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Cat names & descriptions !!

[SHADOWCLAN] —

Leader: Honeystar(A golden-furred she-cat with amber eyes)

Deputy: Badgerhiss(A large brown tabby tom with yellow eyes)

Apprentice: Mudpaw

Medicine Cat: Sunnypool (A golden tabby tom with unusually blue eyes)

Warriors(Toms and she-cats without kits):

Redfang (A longhair ginger tabby tom with amber eyes)

Cloveryawn (A pure white she-cat with fluffy fur and bright green eyes)

Stungface(A black tom with an orange face and yellow eyes)

Apprentice: Beepaw

Poppystep (A pretty ginger she-cat with thick fur and blue eyes)

Rabbitspring (A longhair cream colored she-cat)

Apprentice: Frostpaw

Smokefur (A thin shorthair dark gray tom with bright green eyes)

Stoneface (A light gray tom with a darker gray face)

Springfoot (A pretty tortoiseshell she-cat one blue eye and one green eye)

Apprentices:

Beepaw(A pale ginger she-cat with darker stripes)

Frostpaw(A pure white she-cat with bright blue eyes, former rogue)

Mudpaw(An orange-y brown tabby tom with green eyes)

Queens(She-cats expecting/nursing kits):

Summerprowl(Kit: Autumnkit)

Dawntuft(Kits: Squidkit and Berrykit)

Pearlface(An off-white, fluffy furred she-cat with pale green eyes)

Elders:

Toadcroak (A tom who was once black, now gray)

Flywhisker (A she-cat who retired early due to going blind)

[RIVERCLAN] —

Leader: Beaverstar (An old, brown tabby tom with a bushy dark brown tail)

Deputy: Saffronpetal (A blue-gray she-cat with green eyes)

Medicine cat: Ottercrest (A light brown tabby she-cat with blue eyes)

Apprentice: Thistlepaw

Warriors: (Toms and she-cats without kits)

Tumblefoot (Golden tom with amber eyes)

Doveheart (A white she-cat with yellow eyes)

Sandstripe (Pale ginger tom with blue eyes)

Cedarleaf (Light brown tom with darker flecks)

Rushblink (Light gray tabby she-cat with bright blue eyes)

Apprentice: Geckopaw

Cheetahleg (A yellow she-cat with dark brown spots and long legs)

Rustleheart (Gray tabby tom with blue eyes)

Apprentice: Mosspaw

Nettlethroat (Ginger tom with amber eyes)

Puddlefur (Black she-cat with pale blue eyes)

Fernshine (Gray tabby she-cat with green eyes)

Apprentices:

Geckopaw (Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes)

Mosspaw (Light brown tom with green eyes)

Thistlepaw (White tom with blind eyes— medicine cat apprentice)

Queens (She-cats nursing/expecting kits):

Violetwing (Kits: Sorrelkit and Spottedkit)

Willownose (White she-cat with light gray flecks)

1.

Pearlface awoke as breeze flowed through the nursery, Autumnkit already mewling and suckling from Summerprowl, his mothers, belly. Squidkit, Berrykit, and Dawntuft were all sound asleep still. Pearlface yawned as she stood up from her nest, walking slowly to the fresh-kill pile. She picked up a fish and quickly ate it, finding herself hungrier than usual now that her kits were due soon.

Sunnypool, the medicine cat, trotted next to Pearlface, a friendly smile on his face. "Pearlface, how are you feeling this morning?" He purred softly. Pearlface smiled, grateful for his caring nature. "I'm fine. A bit of a bellyache, but that's to be expected with kits on the way..." She meowed to her friend. Badgerhiss, her mate, padded up next to her and licked her cheek lovingly. Mudpaw, who had just become an apprentice recently, raced next to Pearlface as well. He was her first and only kit, so he was more than excited to have little siblings.

"Pearlface, Pearlface!!" Mudpaw meowed excitedly, "How much longer?" Pearlface chuckled at her son's excitement. "Patience, Mudpaw. Any day now." She mewed softly, giving Mudpaw's ear a swift lick. He rolled his eyes, rubbing the area his mother had licked with his paw. "Hey! I'm not a kit anymore...!" He complained. Pearlface just chuckled as Badgerhiss ushered her back into the nursery.

"You should be resting anyways." He scolded, as if he were a medicine cat scolding their sick patient for trying to go on patrol. Pearlface rolled her eyes but laid down in her moss bed. Badgerhiss exited the den to go on a dawn patrol with Springfoot, Stungface and Beepaw, and Mudpaw.

A few hours later, the sun had reached its peak in the sky. Sunnypool trotted towards the nursery to check on Pearlface, only to find her yowling for him. "Sunnypool, come quick!!" She yowled, gasping for breath. Sunnypool, Mudpaw, and Badgerhiss all raced into the den.

"Her kits are coming!" Summerprowl explained frantically. Autumnkit was close to his mother's side. Sunnypool and Badgerhiss rushed over, and one of the kits was already coming. Pearlface yowled in pain, her claws sinking into the moss bed underneath her. Sunnypool successfully delivered the first kit, handing it to Badgerhiss so he could lick it to warm it up.

Sunnypool began to help the second kit get out, but Pearlface was beginning to bleed a lot. "Mudpaw! Go fetch borage and cobwebs from my den!" Sunnypool yowled to the young apprentice, who quickly nodded and soon returned with the herbs. Sunnypool quickly helped Pearlface deliver the rest of the kits, pressing cobweb against her bleeding areas.

He hurriedly gave her borage, but it wasn't helping much. Her breathing was shallow and labored, and the cobwebs were hardly working. The four kits were mewling up against Badgerhiss, clearly in need of milk.

Sunnypool tried desperately to stop all the bleeding, but once he did, Pearlface may have lost too much blood. "Will she be alright?" Badgerhiss asked, a worried look in his eyes. "She's in the paws of StarClan now." Sunnypool meowed softly, uncertainty evident in his eyes. Pearlface looked towards Badgerhiss.

"Please... take care of *our* kits." Pearlface's mew was pained as she shut her eyes. Badgerhiss ran to her side, nudging her with his paws. "No... NO! DON'T LEAVE ME!" He yowled, but not loud enough for StarClan to hear as she joined them. He sat down by her body as she took her final breath.

Dawntuft covered Squidkit's, Berrykit's, and Autumnkit's eyes with her tail. Summerprowl had taken the mewling newborn kits to her side. "I can feed two of them, you can take the other two." She mewed to Dawntuft, who nodded. Sunnypool gave both queens borage as the newborns began to suckle from their bellies. He looked towards Badgerhiss, whose muzzle was still pressed to his deceased mate's pelt.

"Come on, let's take her to Honeystar." Sunnypool mewed gently, grabbing Pearlface by the scruff and carrying her to the clearing.

Badgerhiss followed, his head low.

Honeystar stepped out of her den, gasping when she saw Pearlface's body. Cloveryawn, Pearlface's sister, was at the leaders side. "What in the name of StarClan happened?!" Honeystar asked. "She died giving birth to her kits. All of the kits are okay and suckling from Summerprowl and Dawntuft." Sunnypool explained, casting a glance to Badgerhiss. He sighed softly. "I will name our kits soon... I just..." His mew broke.

"You can have as long as you need to mourn." Honeystar mewed, laying her tail-tip gently on Badgerhiss's shoulder. He cast her a grateful glance, nodding in acknowledgement. Mudpaw slowly padded next to his father, looking down to his mother with teary eyes. Badgerhiss wrapped his tail around Mudpaw, sighing softly.

"She hunts with StarClan now." Badgerhiss mewed, to which Mudpaw nodded solemnly.

Honeystar leaped onto the clan rock, calling a meeting. "All cats who's claws are sharp enough to fight, gather beneath the rock for a clan meeting!" She yowled. Every cat slowly gathered beneath the rock, all immediately noticing the fact that Pearlface's lifeless body sat in the clearing. "Pearlface has sadly passed while giving birth to her new litter of kits. She will be buried tomorrow at sunhigh. For now, those who were closest to her will have time to mourn." She said loud enough for all cats in the clearing to hear.

"She will be welcomed into StarClan." Smokefur, a tom who had trained side-by-side with Pearlface mewed. "She was young." Toadcroak, the oldest cat in the clan, added. Cloveryawn nodded, sitting next to her sister's body and pressing her nose against it. Mudpaw, Honeystar, Badgerstar, and Sunnypool did the same. His ears pinned to the back of his head. "I'm sorry I couldn't save you." He whispered. This was the first time he'd ever failed to deliver a litter of kits.

Honeystar frowned. "It's not your fault, Sunnypool. It's what StarClan had in store for her." She said softly, to which he just nodded. Badgerhiss nodded in agreement with Honeystar. Sunnypool sighed and stood up, trotting off to his den. Smokefur

had been having troubles with aching joints lately. He was the oldest warrior, but refused to join Toadcroak and Flywhisker in the elders den just yet.

Sunnypool gave Smokefur a poultice of ragwort and juniper berries for his aching joints. "You know," Sunnypool began, "You've been coming to me a lot more recently for aching joints. Almost as much as Toadcroak does."

Smokefur must've caught onto the undertone of that statement, because he hissed at the medicine cat. "I don't need to retire yet." He snarled defensively. Sunnypool knew how much it meant for a cat to fulfill their duty as a warrior, but Smokefur had done just that for many moons. His body was scared as evidence of previous battles, his already-gray fur turning even darker as the moons passed and he grew older.

"I know what it means to you to be a warrior." Sunnypool meowed understandingly. "What do *you* know about being a warrior?! You're a medicine cat!" Smokefur snapped, the fur on his neck bristling.

"I do just as much for ShadowClan as you do." Sunnypool had to keep the venom out of his mew. "I know what it's like to feel like you have a role to fulfill, but you have been a great warrior for many moons. I'm just saying, you can't do this forever." He continued, now becoming more calm. Knowing that Sunnypool was right, Smokefur turned around and left the den.

Sunnypool left as well not too long after, entering the nursery to check on the newborn kits. "How are they?" He asked gently to Summerprowl and Dawntuft. "They're asleep right now." Dawntuft mewed quietly, as to not disturb any of the kits curled up against her. Sunnypool nodded. "Are they nursing alright?" He asked worriedly. He already lost Pearlface, he wasn't going to lose her kits too. "They're fine." Summerprowl reassured him.

Sunnypool gave a thankful nod before slowly beginning to pad out of the den. He looked up at the sky as the sun began to set. He grabbed a plump squirrel from the fresh-kill pile, sitting outside of his den and watching the sunset as he ate it. The rest of the clan

began retreating into their dens now that it was dark outside. Sunnypool figured he should get some rest, so he entered his den and curled up in his nest, quickly drifting off to a sleep.

When he opened his eyes, he realized he was still dreaming. He stood on the edge of a cliff, images of a white cat tumbling with a brown tabby.

"There will come two cats with powers like no other to end the wrath of the badger"

Sunnypool's surroundings faded away into stars. Soon, he woke up in the medicine den. StarClan had given him a new prophecy... but what did it mean?

2.

Five moons had passed since the prophecy came to Sunnypool, and he'd pushed it to the back of his mind. All four of Pearlface's kits had been named. There was Amberkit, a light brown she-kit with amber eyes and white paws, Molekit, a brown tabby tom who looked like a little version of Badgerhiss, Rainkit, a brown tom similar to Molekit but with big blue eyes, and Whitekit, a flame-point siamese who looks more like Pearlface than any of the rest of his litter.

Squidkit and Berrykit were now Squidpaw and Berrypaw, now being apprenticed by Poppystep and Springfoot. Mudpaw and Beepaw were both almost warriors with their final assessments coming up soon. Frostpaw was now a warrior, now named Frostflower.

In the nursery, Summerprowl was furiously grooming Autumnkit's pelt. He was trying to squirm out of her grasp, but her tail kept him in place.

Molekit, Whitekit, Rainkit, and Amberkit all sat next to Cloveryawn and Summerprowl, who had both become mother-figures to them. "What's going on?" Amberkit whispered to Rainkit. "Autumnkit is having his apprentice ceremony today, mouse-brain!" Rainkit whispered back to his sister. She playfully swiped at his ears. "I'm not a mouse-brain!" She whined. Rainkit pounced on her, the two kits tumbling until they bumped into one of the nursery walls. Cloveryawn pushed them out of the nursery with her tail.

"Take it outside if you're going to play!" She scolded softly. Rainkit and Amberkit continued to play outside, Whitekit and Molekit soon joining them.

Whitekit sprung up onto his hind legs, managing to balance himself. "I'm a ThunderClan cat!" He announced. Rainkit sprung onto his brother, claws sheathed, as the two tumbled. Rainkit pinned Whitekit, who wrapped his front paws around the other and rolled

the both of them over so that he was now on top. Rainkit yowled, using his back paws to kick Whitekit off of him. Amberkit attacked Whitekit from the side while Molekit attacked Rainkit. All four kits yowled and tumbled until Whitekit stumbled into a wall in the camp.

As he did, he fell over on his back and shut his eyes. His three siblings stopped playing and ran over to him. "Whitekit!!" Rainkit nudged his brother with his paws. "Whitekit!" He yowled again. Suddenly, Whitekit jumped up and pounced onto Rainkit. Rainkit swiped him over the ears. "Mouse-brain!!" He whined. "We thought you were hurt!" Amberkit added.

"Oh, please!" Whitekit hopped off of Rainkit, his tail flicking behind him. "Nothing can hurt *me*!" He teased. Molekit rolled his eyes as Whitekit continued, "When we're all warriors, the other clans won't have anything against us!!"

Amberkit nodded, a glow in her amber eyes. "Maybe you're less of a mouse-brain than I thought." She teased. Rainkit chuckled, nodding in agreement with both Whitekit and Amberkit. "We'll make the strongest warriors together!" Confidence was evident in his mew. "And none of the cats in any of the clans will have a chance against us!" Molekit added proudly.

But their conversation was cut short as Honeystar leapt onto the Clan Rock. "All cats who's claws are sharp enough to fight, gather beneath the rock for a clan meeting!" She yowled. Every cat began to take their places beneath the clan rock, looking up towards the leader. The four siblings all sat together, Dawntuft and Summerprowl both behind them. "Autumnkit, come forwards." Honeystar called.

Autumnkit excitedly stepped forwards into the clearing, looking up at Honeystar as his eyes shown. "Autumnkit, you have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this moment until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Autumnpaw. Your mentor will be Smokefur. Hopefully he will pass down his experience and wisdom onto you." Sunnypool tensed as Honeystar announced that Smokefur would be Autumnpaw's mentor. Surely he was far too old?

But when the ceremony concluded and the clan was dismissed, Sunnypool quietly stalked back over to his den. Autumnpaw and Smokefur were already off for training, while Rainkit, Whitekit, and Amberkit continued to play. However, Molekit was nowhere to be found. Cloveryawn was worriedly looking for him.

"Whitekit!" She panted, clearly having run all over camp. "Have you seen Molekit anywhere?!" Whitekit was alarmed to hear that his brother was seemingly missing. "No..." He answered, worry creeping into his mew. Cloveryawn didn't try to calm her sister's kit down, instead racing out of the camp. Summerprowl, the she-cat who had nursed him as a newborn, placed her tail-tip gently on his shoulder.

"I'm sure Molekit is fine." She soothed, but Whitekit hardly heard her. He slowly padded into the nursery and curled up in his nest, closing his eyes, but knowing that Molekit wasn't there prevented him from sleeping. When he opened his eyes, he realized he wasn't in the nursery. When he looked down at his paws, they were brown.

Where am I? He thought. The brown paws suddenly stopped moving. "Whitekit?" Molekit's voice rang out in his ears. *Molekit?*! Whitekit swore he had to be dreaming. How could Molekit hear his thoughts? "Whitekit, where are you?" Molekit called, looking around. *I'm in the nursery!* Whitekit replied, *I'm seeing through your eyes!*

Molekit was astonished to say the least, his eyes widening. *Where are you? Cloveryawn is worried sick! She's hardly keeping her fur on*! Whitekit demanded. As he looked around through Molekit's eyes, he could see tall oak trees and lots of bushes, but it wasn't nearly close to the swampy pines of ShadowClan territory. Whitekit suddenly remembered the descriptions of other clans the older cats had told him as a kit. *ThunderClan*! He thought, not realizing Molekit could still hear him.

"ThunderClan?" Molekit repeated out loud. *You're in ThunderClan territory!* Whitekit replied through his thoughts.

Suddenly, Whitekit opened his eyes and he was back in the nursery. Amberkit was shaking him. "Whitekit, Whitekit!!" She yowled as she jabbed him with her paw. Whitekit shot up, his eyes wide after his

vision. "What is it?" He asked. "You've been mumbling in your sleep all night! When I tried to wake you, you wouldn't budge!" She explained, clearly worried over her littermate.

"Sorry!" He apologized, "I had a bad dream..." Whitekit felt bad about lying to her, but he knew she wouldn't believe him if he told her the truth. Amberkit sighed before curling back up in her nest. Whitekit stood up and stalked towards the medicine den, where he could hear Cloveryawn's worried wailing. He pricked his ears, listening into the conversation.

"I can't rest until he's found!" Cloveryawn wailed. Whitekit poked his head into the den. "I know where Molekit is!" He announced.

3.

"I know where Molekit is!" Whitekit announced. Sunnypool's eyes widened, but Cloveryawn jumped to her paws. "Where?! Show me!" The white she-cat demanded. Whitekit closed his eyes for a moment before opening them again. Molekit was in the ThunderClan camp! "He's in the ThunderClan camp!" He announced. "How do you-" Sunnypool began, but Cloveryawn cut him off by bounding out of the medicine den. Sunnypool and Whitekit followed, the three cats sprinting until they reached the ThunderClan border.

Sunnypool and Cloveryawn skidded to a halt, but Whitekit had already crossed the border before he stopped. "Come on! Why did you stop?" He asked, not realizing he crossed the border. He wrinkled his nose as he scented a ThunderClan patrol. ThunderClan smelled musty, like an old oak tree. Cloveryawn tried to get him back onto their side of the border, but Ashtail had already spotted them.

"ShadowClan!" She hissed, unsheathing her claws. The rest of her patrol, Vinepool, Acornheart, and Lionclaw emerged from the bushes after her. Lionclaw, the fiercest of the group, growled and unsheathed his claws. "You dare come here after we find an apprentice of yours on our territory?!" He snarled.

Sunnypool calmly spoke, "He's a kit. And so is this one." He wrapped his tail around Whitekit, pushing him over to Cloveryawn's paws. "We're only here to retrieve him." He continued. Ashtail scoffed.

"Fine then. You come with us." She snarled at Sunnypool. He nodded his head before trotting off. Whitekit shut his eyes tight, suddenly seeing out of Sunnypool's eyes. As they approached the camp, Whitekit saw Molekit in the clearing. *Molekit*! He tried to call out, but Molekit couldn't hear him. Sunnypool's eyes widened for a moment, but he quickly pretended like nothing happened. Was that Whitekit's mew?

Sunnypool hardly had any time to think about it as Poppystar stepped out of her den. Her eyes landed on Sunnypool. She bared her fangs, but kept her claws sheathed. Molekit ran over to Sunnypool, trembling behind him.

"Why are you here?" Poppystar demanded, her deputy, Thrushfoot, standing behind her. "You have a ShadowClan kit in our camp," The medicine cat, Brightwing, added calmly. Poppystar scoffed, growling at the ShadowClan medicine cat. "Tell Honeystar to keep her clans kits under control." She hissed. "Dunerunner, Stormpelt! Escort them to the border!" She ordered before stalling off to her den.

Dunerunner and Stormpelt escorted the two cats out of camp. While Sunnypool wasn't looking, Stormpelt bared his fangs at Molekit. He hissed in his ear, "You'd better be careful next time."

Dunerunner swiped at Stormpelt's ears. "You're gonna make him think ThunderClan eats kits for breakfast!" She scolded her clanmate. He just rolled his eyes and stayed quiet until they reached the border. Molekit quickly scrambled to ShadowClan's side. "You don't need to be afraid of us, little one. Stormpelt is just trying to scare you." Dunerunner soothed, but Stormpelt just scoffed. "Yeah, yeah. Just don't cross our border again." He growled.

Molekit and Sunnypool soon arrived back at the ShadowClan camp. Cloveryawn ran over to Molekit and began to lick him fiercely. Once she was done fussing over him, Whitekit beckoned with his tail for Molekit to follow him.

The two kits wiggled their way in between a clump of bushes and brambles behind the elders den. "I found this earlier." Whitekit explained. Molekit just nodded. "I... I heard you earlier." He mewed, "How did you do that?"

Whitekit shrugged. "I-I don't know..." He admitted, shifting his paws. "I just closed my eyes... and I could suddenly see your paws."

"You *must* have powers!" Molekit's eyes shone. "There's never been another cat who can just do that out of nowhere!" Whitekit's pelt felt warm. He didn't want his brother to think that he was more

special than him and his other littermates. "It probably was just a one-time thing. You know, so StarClan could let me know where you were." Whitekit tried to reason. Molekit frowned but reluctantly agreed to it being a one-time thing.

A few sunrises later, Whitekit woke up before the rest of his littermates. He yawned, stretching his short legs before getting out of his nest. He glanced at Cloveryawn, who was sound asleep, before sneaking out of the bramble entrance of the nursery.

As he crept over to the fresh-kill pile to grab a mouse, he suddenly heard a leaf rustling behind him. He spun around, only to see Sunnypool. Whitekit sighed, letting the fur on his neck lie flat. "Whitekit. I've been meaning to speak to you..." Sunnypool spoke, glancing around to make sure no other cat was listening. "Come with me to my den."

Whitekit grabbed a mouse in his jaws before following Sunnypool into the medicine den. "So," Sunnypool began, "When I was in the ThunderClan camp with Molekit... how did you see him too? Did you follow me?"

Whitekit shook his head. "I didn't follow you. But there's this thing I learned I can do. When I knew where Molekit was.. it's because I saw him. I was seeing through his eyes. When you heard my voice... I thought he could, too. But he didn't." Whitekit explained, shuffling his paws in front of him nervously. What if Sunnypool thought he was lying.

However, Sunnypool remembered the prophecy StarClan had given to him on the day Whitekit was born. *"There will come two cats with powers like no other to end the wrath of the badger"* Whitekit must be one of those two cats! But Sunnypool couldn't tell him quite yet. Not until he was sure who the other cat was, or what the prophecy meant by *the badger*. However, he couldn't think of an excuse as to why this was happening to Whitekit.

"Molekit agreed it must've just been StarClan telling me where he was, but then.. why did it happen again?" Whitekit asked with a pleading gaze. Sunnypool frowned. Perhaps it was a better idea to tell Whitekit about the prophecy? "Well, can you still do it?"

Sunnypool asked. Whitekit shrugged, "I don't know.." He admitted. Sunnypool stood up. "I'll go outside the camp. You stay here and try to.. do that again." He said. Whitekit nodded as Sunnypool left the medicine den and left the camp.

Whitekit closed his eyes and tried to relax, trying to think about nothing else but Sunnypool. When he opened his eyes again, he was outside of the camp. *Sunnypool*? He thought, hoping the medicine cat could hear him. "Whitekit!" Sunnypool said aloud, trying to keep his mew quiet. He knew for a fact Whitekit didn't follow him— he would've noticed! "I'm coming back." He said.

Whitekit opened his eyes, back in his own body as he looked around the medicine den. Sunnypool soon returned, his blue eyes wide. "Whitekit, there is something I must tell you..." He began, taking a seat in front of Whitekit. He had a serious look in his eyes. *Oh great*, Whitekit thought, but didn't dare to say out loud.

"Five moons ago, the night you were born, StarClan gave me a prophecy." He said, silently wishing he didn't have to tell such a young kit this. "It stated that two cats with powers like no other will come. Whitekit, I believe you are one of those two cats."

Whitekit's pale blue eyes widened, but he didn't look excited. "No!" He suddenly yowled, jumping up to his paws. "I'm not some special prophecy cat! I just want to be normal! Like my littermates!" He bounded out of the den, but Sunnypool quickly grabbed him by the scruff to keep him from leaving.

"Listen to me!" Sunnypool spat angrily. Whitekit's ears pinned to the back of his head. "You aren't to tell any cat what I told you, okay? It's a message from StarClan. You'll have to learn to live with these powers." He said, his mew quieting down a bit. "Fine," Whitekit reluctantly agreed, "But I won't like it!"

4.

Molekit was picking ticks out of Toadcroak's gray-and-black fur, which was his punishment for sneaking out of camp and causing trouble with ThunderClan. He wrinkled his nose at the smell of mouse bile on his paws. He used his claws to kill a tick just above Toadcroak's tail, refusing to use his teeth. *How do Squidpaw and Berrypaw do this all the time?* Molekit wondered to himself. "That should be all of 'em." Toadcroak rasped. Molekit sighed in relief as he exited the den to go wash his paws off. Just as he was about to finish up, Honeystar called a meeting.

"All cats whose claws are sharp enough to fight, gather for a clan meeting!" She yowled across the clearing. Every cat gathered beneath the clan rock, Molekit sitting with his three littermates "Any idea what this is about?" He asked Whitekit. He'd been too busy all morning tending to Toadcroak's ticks to talk with Whitekit.

"Beepaw and Mudpaw are getting their warrior ceremonies!" Whitekit whispered excitedly. Mudpaw was their older brother, the only kit from Pearlface's first litter. Molepaw looked over at Mudpaw, who was lashing his tail excitedly next to Badgerhiss, his mentor and his father.

"Two apprentices have had their final assessments today. Beepaw and Mudpaw!" She began. Cheers and yowls began before Honeystar silenced them with a flick of her tail. Molekit stared in awe. He wanted to be that powerful one day, to be able to silence a whole crowd of warriors with just a flick of his tail!

To be a leader.

"Stungface. How did Beepaw's assessment go?" Honeystar asked, her voice calm and her amber eyes hardly suppressing her excitement. "She did great! On her own, she caught two mice. During team hunting with Frostflower, they caught a squirrel together. They did a great job with their teamwork, and it was a very neat catch." Stungface said, pride evident in his mew. Honeystar nodded before

shifting her gaze to Badgerhiss.

"Mudpaw did phenomenal on his assessment. He caught a fish on his own, and a blackbird and two squirrels with Stoneface." Badgerhiss boasted, casting a glance at Stungface, who flicked his tail. Whitekit could tell Badgerhiss was suggesting Mudpaw was better than Beepaw.

Honeystar, however, didn't notice this as she continued on. "Well it seems these two shall receive their warrior names today!" She decided. "I call upon StarClan to look down upon these two apprentices and guide their path as a warrior. Beepaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and protect ShadowClan, even at the cost of your life?" Honeystar's gaze landed on Beepaw, her voice booming through the clearing.

"I do!" Beepaw replied, unable to keep the excitement out of her mew. "Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. From this moment forward, you will be known as Beeflight. StarClan honors your compassion and bravery." Honeystar pressed her muzzle to Beeflight's forehead, and she licked the leaders shoulder. Honeystar leapt back up onto the rock.

"Mudpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and protect ShadowClan, even at the cost of your life?" Honeystar repeated to Mudpaw, who nodded eagerly. "I promise." He mewed proudly and confidently. "By the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. From this moment on, you will be known as Mudstrike. StarClan admires your strength and dedication." Honeystar announced.

"Mudstrike! Beeflight!" Cheers and yowls arose within the clan. "Meeting dismissed!" Honeystar yowled over the crowd.

Badgerhiss began dismissing patrols, while Whitekit, Molekit, Rainkit, and Amberkit all played outside of the nursery. Mudstrike didn't end up being put on patrol, so Whitekit ran over to him. "What's it feel like to be a warrior?" He asked excitedly. Mudstrike just shrugged. "Not much different from being an apprentice. I wasn't even put on patrol." Mudstrike mewed disappointedly. Beeflight padded up to his side. "Mudstrike! You wanna go hunting

together?" She asked happily. Mudstrike's pelt felt slightly warmer as he nodded. "Talk to you later, Whitekit!" He called over his shoulder before bounding off with Beeflight.

Whitekit sighed and padded off to the nursery to play with his littermates. He snuck up behind Amberkit, pouncing on her tail as she spun around and batted her paws at him. He wanted to be a normal kit for as long as he could. Before Sunnypool's prophecy came true.

(A/N: sorry for the short chapter!! I promise the next one will be a lot longer '-ω-')

5.

Sunnypool yawned and curled up in his nest. It was past moonhigh, but he'd been busy all day treating a case of Whitecough that Frostflower had caught, as well as Smokefur's aching bones. He knew the tom was too old to not be retired already, but he was too tired to think about it.

As he drifted off to sleep, he awoke in the camp clearing. He was met by ShadowClan's old medicine cat, Streamfall, and the leader just before Honeystar, Brackenstar. "Brackenstar. Streamfall." Sunnypool greeted the two StarClan cats, dipping his head. They both dipped their head in return. "It is good to see you again." Brackenstar mewed. "But, the news we bring isn't as pleasant."

Sunnypool frowned, but nodded. "This leaf-bare will be harsher than ever." Streamfall began, worry creeping into her mew. "You must start stocking up as many herbs as you can. Especially catmint." She continued. "We must go tell Honeystar as well." Brackenstar said before he and Streamfall began to fade away.

Yet, that was not the end of Sunnypool's dream. He could suddenly hear coughing from his den. As he looked inside, he could see many ShadowClan warriors in his den, sick with either greencough or whitecough. His eyes landed on Toadcroak and Smokefur, who were both thin and very clearly unwell. The elderly tom's were dying of greencough!

Sunnypool's eyes shot open, and he was back in his nest. He sighed when he saw that Frostflower was still the only cat in his den. He was relieved to hear that her breathing was getting better thanks to the tansy he gave her. He was still worried after that dream, so he prepared more tansy for when she woke up. When she did, he gave it to her. She reluctantly lapped it up. "Ugh... why do herbs have to be so bitter?" She muttered, wrinkling her nose.

"Just eat them." Sunnypool mewed, "You'll be back to your warrior duties in no time." Frostflower sighed, swallowing the herbs before

lapping up some water from a ball of moss. Sunnypool padded out of his den, across the clearing, and poked his head into Honeystar's den. "Come in!" She called. Sunnypool padded into the den, a serious look on his face.

"StarClan gave me a sign. There's going to be a bad case of greencough this leaf-bare." Sunnypool couldn't help the bit of worry that crept into his mew. Honeystar nodded, "I'll make sure to send out extra herb patrols until leaf-bare arrives." She decided. Sunnypool nodded his thanks before exiting the den.

Only a few sunrises had passed and Frostflower had been cured of her whitecough, but Smokefur and Dawntuft had ended up catching it as well. A few snowflakes were beginning to fall, but it wasn't quite yet enough to kill off all of the herbs. Although, they certainly weren't growing any longer. It was far too cold.

Whitekit was worried for Dawntuft, as she had nursed him and Amberkit when their real mother died. He padded into the medicine den to find Sunnypool. "Sunnypool! Can I go out and look for catmint?" He asked bashfully. Sunnypool looked unsure, considering Molekit had just recently gotten lost in ThunderClan territory. Besides, Whitekit didn't know what tansy or catmint looked like. "Hm... alright, but I'll come with you." He finally agreed. Whitekit was practically bouncing with excitement.

Sunnypool led Whitekit out of the den and to a patch of tansy. "Catmint is the best for greencough, but it's harder to find once leaf-bare starts." Sunnypool explained, as if Whitekit were his apprentice. He bit off some of the tansy leaves and pawed them over to Whitekit to carry them. He picked them up in his mouth, not seeming to mind the taste at all. "What's catmint look like? I wanna know in case I ever spot some!" Whitekit mewed between a mouthful of tansy.

Sunnypool lead Whitekit to a bit of catmint nearby. He carefully bit off as many of the leaves as he could before turning to Whitekit. "This is catmint." He mewed before picking up the catmint and heading back towards the camp. He sorted the tansy and catmint into his stock, giving Smokefur some tansy. The old tom wouldn't last long in the cold before catching greencough.

"I'll be fine." Smokefur rasped, pushing the tansy away with his nose before letting out a cough. Sunnypool rolled his blue eyes. "Just eat them, and you'll be feeling better soon enough." He scolded, as if a queen to her kit. Smokefur grumbled before lapping up the tansy without any further complaint.

The medicine cat suddenly remembered his vision, where Smokefur had been dying of greencough. The old tom seemed to be getting better currently, but would he survive once the frost came?

"StarClan to Sunnypool!" Sunnypool was snapped out of his thoughts when he heard Smokefur's complaints. "Have you fallen asleep?" He snapped. "Sorry! I was just thinking." Sunnypool muttered, looking down at his paws.

Smokefur needed to retire. Soon. He wasn't strong enough to keep on going. "Smokefur.." Sunnypool cast a glance to Dawntuft, who was asleep. "You must retire. You're getting old." He hated to be so blunt, but it was necessary. A growl rose in Smokefur's throat. "I have an apprentice, mouse-brain! I can't just retire while I'm mentoring him!" He argued.

"You must!" Sunnypool pleaded, but Smokefur wasn't having it. He'*s too old! How could Honeystar give him an apprentice at his age?* Sunnypool thought angrily. He sighed, deciding to dismiss the conversation. "You cannot carry on forever." He mumbled before walking away.

Honeystar was in the clearing, sharing tongues with Redfang as Sunnypool trotted over. "Ah, Sunnypool! Just the cat I was looking to speak with." She said, a friendly-yet-serious look in her eyes. "I've been thinking.. about Smokefur." She admitted.

Redfang nodded. "I spoke to her about how old Smokefur is." He explained, his meow deep and gruff. "I didn't realize how old he truly was until I'd already made Autumnpaw his apprentice." Honeystar sounded a bit guilty as she continued, "But he's stubborn. He won't retire until Autumnpaw is a warrior."

"We were hoping you could convince him to retire." Redfang chimed in once again. Sunnypool looked down at his paws again.

"I've tried. He keeps insisting he's in a good enough condition to continue his warrior duties." He mewed. Honeystar sighed and nodded. "I figured that'd be the case." A hint of annoyance crept into her mew.

Honeystar waited for a few heartbeats before dismissing Sunnypool, who walked off into his den. He turned to his herb stock, pretending to sort through it, while he was silently worrying about Smokefur.

6.

It was early in the morning as Honeystar leapt onto the clan rock and called a meeting. The dawn patrol hadn't even left yet! Whitekit yawned and stumbled sleepily into the clearing, leaning against Rainkit slightly.

"We have four kits who have reached the age of six moons." Honeystar began, to which Whitekit and his three littermates all perked up. "Whitekit, Rainkit, Molekit, and Amberkit, step forwards." She called. Molekit was the first to stand up, bounding into the middle of the clearing before any of his littermates. "You all have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed." Honeystar meowed.

"From this moment until you receive your warrior names, you will be known as Whitepaw, Rainpaw, Amberpaw, and Molepaw." Honeystar continued, "Molepaw, your mentor will be Rabbitspring. I hope that she will pass down her knowledge and strength onto you." Molepaw excitedly touched his nose to Rabbitspring's.

"Rainpaw, your mentor will be Frostflower. She is a young warrior, but she is strong and capable. I wish that she passes down her bravery and skill onto you." Frostflower could hardly wait to touch noses with Rainpaw after Honeystar finished speaking. "Amberpaw, your mentor will be Dawntuft. I hope that she will teach you her fighting techniques and bravery." Honeystar looked over to Whitepaw as Dawntuft and Amberpaw touched noses.

"Whitepaw, your mentor will be Redfang. I hope he will pass down his hunting skills and loyalty onto you." Honeystar concluded the ceremony after Redfang and Whitepaw touched noses.

Right after the ceremony, all four new mentors gathered with their apprentices. "Dawntuft and I will take Molepaw and Whitepaw on border patrol. You two will take Amberpaw and Rainpaw hunting." Redfang decided, to which Rabbitspring, Dawntuft, and Frostflower agreed.

Redfang and Dawntuft, his mate, walked side-by-side with their new apprentices following them. "We'll go to the RiverClan border first." Dawntuft decided, her pelt brushing against Redfang's. "It should be easy enough for them to remember the scent of RiverClan," Redfang joked, "Fish and fur is a hard stench to forget!"

Dawntuft gave a purr of amusement as they neared the stream that separated ShadowClan and RiverClan. Redfang held his tail in front of Whitepaw and Molepaw, signaling for them to stop. Whitepaw had to spit out some of the fur that hit him in the mouth.

"This is the RiverClan border. Just across this stream is where RiverClan territory begins." Redfang explained. Whitepaw's eyes were wide with awe, but Molepaw sniffed the air, his nose wrinkling at RiverClan's scent. "Ugh! Are you sure RiverClan pelts aren't made of fish?!" He complained, which Dawnpelt found rather amusing. Even Redfang had to stifle a *mrrrow* of laughter.

But Whitepaw didn't find the scent all that bad. After all, ShadowClan ate their fair share of fish too. Just before Whitepaw could say anything, a RiverClan warrior and her apprentice emerged from a bush.

The apprentice's tortoiseshell pelt immediately caught Whitepaw's gaze. The young apprentice was very pretty... any cat in her clan would be lucky to have her. He was slightly jealous that he could never be her mate once they grew older. But he shook those thoughts away. There'd be plenty of she-cats in his clan when he was a warrior.

"What are you all doing so close to the border?" The warrior demanded, her voice booming across the stream.

Who made dirt in her fresh-kill? Whitepaw joked to himself, but didn't say anything out loud. "Calm down, Rushblink. No need to make a fuss. We're only here to show our apprentices the border." Dawntuft mewed, her tone level. Whitepaw could see the anger in Redfang's eyes. The tom was much more aggressive than his mate, and it was obvious from the lashing of his tail.

The RiverClan warrior, Rushblink, scoffed in response. "You

ShadowClan fleabags better not step paw on our territory!" She hissed. The small apprentice next to her shrunk back slightly, as if she felt bad for what her mentor was saying. "Come on, Geckopaw. Let's go hunt elsewhere." She decided, turning around and stalking off into the bushes.

"Sorry!" Geckopaw whispered to the ShadowClan cats before racing off with her mentor.

Redfang hadn't seemed to accept that apology. "The audacity of those RiverClan warriors!" He spat, "She's barely been a warrior for over a moon! She's clearly not ready for an apprentice when she's so disrespectful to other clans!" Dawntuft put her tail on Redfang's shoulder to calm him down.

"What Beaverstar decides for his clan's apprentices is none of our concern, Redfang. How about we hunt to calm down?" She mewed sweetly. "Fine..." Redfang muttered, though Whitepaw could tell he still wanted to shred Rushblink's fur off. "I'll take Molepaw hunting near the Greenleaf Twolegplace." Dawntuft mewed before trotting off with Molepaw.

Redfang looked down at Whitepaw. "Come on. We'll hunt near the Twoleg path." He decided, trotting ahead as Whitepaw followed him. Once they reached a marsh, Redfang stopped walking and turned towards Whitepaw. "Show me your best hunters crouch." He instructed. Whitepaw crouched close to the ground, his legs and forepaws close to him. Redfang seemed impressed. "Cloveryawn taught me and my littermates while I was still in the nursery." Whitepaw explained, his mew sheepish.

That caused Redfang to swipe him over the ears, claws sheathed. "Don't be embarrassed about it, mouse-brain. It's impressive that you have such a good hunters crouch when you're so young. I've seen warriors do worse." Redfang's mew was sharp and harsh, but Whitepaw caught the compliment. "Now, what can you smell?" He asked.

Whitepaw sniffed the air and opened his jaws slightly, as he'd learned to do from Cloveryawn. "Squirrel!" He mewed excitedly. He moved into the undergrowth after Redfang instructed him to do so.

"Follow the squirrels scent and get close enough to pounce on it. You need to be ready to leap at any moment." Redfang mewed, hiding behind a bush so that no prey would scent him. Whitepaw moved downwind of the squirrel, slowly stalking towards the scent.

He saw the squirrel on a tree root that stuck out of the ground, too busy eating to notice him. He stalked just a bit closer before shifting his weight to his back legs and lunging forwards, catching the squirrel's tail with his claws and giving it the killing bite. Redfang padded up to Whitepaw's side. "Great first catch!" He praised, approving of his apprentice. Whitepaw was practically beaming with excitement. "Let me catch something and then we can head back to camp." Redfang mewed.

After Redfang had caught a fish, and Whitepaw caught a mouse he'd seen along the way back to camp, they arrived right before sunset. Whitepaw dropped his kills into the pile, along with Redfang's fish.

Mudstrike padded up beside him. "Wow, you caught three pieces of prey on your first day?" He sounded impressed. "Actually, I only caught the squirrel and the mouse. Redfang caught the fish." Whitepaw mewed sheepishly. "Still impressive! I could hardly catch a mouse when I was first apprenticed!" Mudstrike praised, his eyes glowing with joy for his little brother. Beeflight padded up to his side, her pelt brushing against his. "He was super clumsy on his paws." She added teasingly.

"Hey, you weren't too good yourself. You were so bad at fighting that you sprained a paw from landing on it too hard." Mudstrike purred back, to which Beeflight swiped at his ears. "I'll claw you the next time you say that!" She threatened, but Whitepaw could tell the threat was empty.

Whitepaw sniffed out a piece of prey, a plump mouse that had been caught by Rainpaw. He ate his brother's catch as the sun was setting, heading off into the apprentices den to sleep. He yawned as he curled up in a nest, excited for what his second day of training would bring!

7.

Geckopaw couldn't get her mind off of what happened at the border, even after a few days had passed. Rushblink was teaching Geckopaw how to catch prey other than fish, for when leaf-bare came. It was already cold outside, but the lakes weren't frozen over yet.

That tom. I swear I've seen him before. But no, I've never met any ShadowClan cats! Why do I feel like I've known him for moons?
"StarClan to Geckopaw! Are you even listening?" Rushblink snapped Geckopaw out of her trance. "Sorry!" She quickly apologized. She sniffed the air, scenting for prey. "Shrew!" She hissed. Rushblink sniffed the air. "What? Where? I don't smell-" She began, but Geckopaw was already chasing the scent.

She soon found the shrew, quickly pouncing on it and killing it with her claws. Rushblink looked stunned. "How did you smell that from so far away?" She questioned, looking behind her. The stream that they'd been next to wasn't even visible any longer. Geckopaw shrugged. "How *couldn't* you?" She mewed, not realizing how far away the shrew had really been.

"Not even Willownose could've smelled that, and she's got the best nose in the clan!" Rushblink persisted. It was impossible for Geckopaw to have scented the shrew from that far away! "Never mind. Fresh-kill is fresh-kill. Let's get back to camp before the sun sets." Rushblink turned around and lead Geckopaw back to the camp.

Geckopaw placed her shrew in the fresh-kill pile before padding away to find Ottercrest, the old medicine cat. She and Thistlepaw were her only two friends, and Ottercrest was getting rather old. She had white fur around her muzzle, and was even beginning to sound like an elder when carrying out her duties.

"Ah, Geckopaw!" Ottercrest mewed, looking over from the herbs she was sorting. Her mew was usually cranky towards other cats, but

towards Geckopaw, she was unusually kind. "Would you mind helping me sort these herbs?" She asked, despite having an apprentice of her own. "Where's Thistlepaw?" Geckopaw asked as she sat down next to the pile of herbs Ottercrest was sorting. "He's out collecting herbs. Or at least, he's supposed to be." The old she-cat rasped.

"What do you think he's doing instead?" Geckopaw asked curiously, picking up some dock leaves and sorting them into Ottercrest's stock. It was obvious she helped out around the medicine den often. "He's probably out trying to hunt. He wishes to be a warrior more than anything. But Birchstar thought he'd be better off as a medicine cat. He thought blind cats could never hunt, or fight." Ottercrest's eyes saddened slightly. Geckopaw could feel her pity for Thistlepaw crashing down on her like boulders.

"Well Birchstar isn't our leader anymore." Geckopaw pointed out. He'd passed only a quarter moon ago. "Yes, but Beaverstar was closer to him than any other cat. They'd been best friends since they were kitted. They trained together, fought every battle alongside each other..." Ottercrest sighed. "Thistlepaw has been my apprentice for a moon. I doubt any warrior would take him as their apprentice."

Suddenly, Thistlepaw entered the den, his blind eyes staring straight at Geckopaw. "What are *you* doing in here?" He hissed, "I'm the medicine cat apprentice, not you!"

Geckopaw was surprised by the hostility in his mew. "I-I'm sorry! You weren't here and Ottercrest asked me to-" Geckopaw began, but was cut off by Thistlepaw. "She doesn't need you! She has me. *I'm* her apprentice. So let me do the one thing I'm useful for in this clan!" Geckopaw didn't need to hear another word. She got up and stalked out of the medicine den, blocking out the sound of Ottercrest scolding him in her den.

He's right, she thought crossly, *he isn't useful for anything else.* She entered the apprentices den, and luckily, Mosspaw wasn't back at camp yet. She didn't like him very much, and the feeling was mutual. She curled up in her nest, yawning and closing her eyes as she drifted off to sleep.

The next morning, Rushblink was nudging her with a forepaw. "Wake up, we're on dawn patrol!" She hissed. Geckopaw groaned and rose to her paws, stretching a bit. Rushblink's gaze softened. "Come on, let's go." She mewed. Geckopaw yawned again and followed Rushblink out of the den. Just as they were about to leave, Branchstar, leader of WindClan, and two warriors, Mistyshine and Finchgrowl entered the camp.

Beaverstar immediately noticed this. "Branchstar? What in the name of StarClan are you doing in the ShadowClan camp?" His question was more of a growl. Saffronpetal had unsheathed her claws, and Violetwing was protecting her kits with her tail.

"We've come to speak with you. Leaf-bare is coming, and we've come to ask for a bit of the clearing next to the border." Branchstar explained. "And what gives you the right to hunt there?" Beaverstar challenged, glaring down at the WindClan leader. "WindClan suffers during leaf-bare—" Mistyshine tried to explain, but Saffronpetal cut her off, "*All* clans suffer during leaf-bare!"

"If you won't allow us to hunt there, there will be a battle." Branchstar warned before turning around and stalking off back into WindClan territory.

8.

A few sunrises later, there was a battle on RiverClan territory. WindClan was close to their camp— too close. Willownose was ready to defend Violetwing and her kits, who were less than a moon old. Rustleheart and Mosspaw were defending the camp entrance in case WindClan tried to invade. And Geckopaw was in the midst of the battle. A scrawny WindClan warrior pounced on her, but despite not being much larger, he was definitely more skilled. He landed a swift blow to her right ear.

"Geckopaw!" Rushblink's yowl rang out in her ears, but another WindClan warrior distracted her by pouncing on her from the back.

Geckopaw spat and yowled in pain, the warrior biting down on her tail. Frantically, she unsheathed her claws and slashed at his face, managing to land a blow on his muzzle. "Hah! Is that all you've got?!" The warrior mocked. Geckopaw's pelt was hot with anger. "I'll show you what I've got!" She spat before digging her claws into his shoulders, managing to push him off of her with a tremendous amount of effort.

She didn't wait for him to stand up before launching herself at his belly, clawing and tearing chunks of fur out of his thick pelt. The warrior yowled, about to retreat, but a WindClan apprentice pounced on Geckopaw first. "Weaseltuft! Are you alright?!" The apprentice called. Weaseltuft stood up, his shoulders bleeding from where Geckopaw had clawed him.

"Of course I'm fine, Featherpaw! She's just an apprentice!" Weaseltuft spat. Geckopaw launched Featherpaw off of her while she was distracted, sending the WindClan apprentice flying into a bramble bush. Geckopaw then spun towards Weaseltuft, raking her claws against his flank. He yowled, jerking away from her before fleeing along with Featherpaw.

Geckopaw sniffed the air. Beyond the mingled scents of RiverClan and WindClan, she scented ThunderClan! She could see them,

bounding over the border and racing towards the battle area. Geckopaw gasped softly, racing over to find Cheetahleg. "Cheetahleg! ThunderClan is coming to help WindClan!" She panted.

"What?!" Cheetahleg gasped, "We need ShadowClan! We can't beat two clans on our own!" She exclaimed worriedly. Geckopaw checked over her shoulder. "You need to go get ShadowClan warriors! Run as fast as you can!" She ordered the older warrior.

Cheetahleg nodded, and within a few heartbeats, she'd vanished into the undergrowth. *She sure is fast.* Geckopaw thought, but her thoughts were cut short when Flashpaw of ThunderClan pounced on her tail. She sniffed the air. *No wonder they call him Flashpaw! He's here before any other ThunderClan cat!* Geckopaw spun around and batted the younger apprentice with her paw. She didn't want to hurt him, so she gave him a quick swipe over the ears.

He didn't seem amused at all. "Fight me like a warrior!" He hissed, his claws unsheathed as he messily lashed at her face. Geckopaw nudged him away. *Maybe learn how to fight like a warrior first!* She thought, remembering that he was made an apprentice a half moon ago.

Geckopaw sniffed the air, swiftly dodging all of Flashpaw's attacks, even though she was hardly paying attention. Her senses reached all the way out to the ShadowClan camp. Cheetahleg was panting as she lapped up water from a moss ball. Once she caught her breath, she explained what was going on. Honeystar gathered some of her warriors before they made their way out of the camp.

Flashpaw finally managed to land a blow on Geckopaw, clawing out a piece of her fur. She hissed, pouncing on him and tumbling over with him. She let herself go limp, causing the small toms paws to be too weak to carry her weight.

They collapsed onto each other. "Ugh! Get off of me!" Flashpaw complained. Geckopaw rolled over and launched him off of her, forcing him into a nearby bramble bush, the same one that she'd thrown Featherpaw into. Flashpaw got stuck in it, writhing around to get himself free.

"Mouse-brained ThunderClan cat." Geckopaw bared her fangs. Just as she unsheathed her claws again, a heavy warrior landed on top of her. She grunted in pain as she looked up to see Boulderslide, a large ThunderClan warrior. He bared his fangs and unsheathed his claws. "You RiverClan flea-pelts dare lay a paw on *my* son?!" He spat, raking his claws along Geckopaw's underbelly. She yowled and writhed in pain, blood seeping through her fur. She helplessly clawed back at him, but only managed to lay a small scratch on his neck. He scoffed. "Is that what you call fighting?" He mocked, biting one of Geckopaw's ears. She yowled above every battling cat as a bit of her ear was torn off.

Her vision was blurring as blood tangled with her fur, her ears ringing as she slowly began to close her eyes. Suddenly, the weight was off of her. She could only make out a silhouette, but a small white apprentice pounced on Boulderslide. She sniffed the air. *ShadowClan!* It was that white apprentice from the border!

Rushblink grabbed Geckopaw by the scruff, rushing her into the camp. Geckopaw's vision blurred again as she closed her eyes.

9.

Whitepaw turned in his nest. Even after a few days, he couldn't get his mind off of Geckopaw. *Had she died? Was he too late to save her?* He forced himself to shut his eyes. But his mind swirled with thoughts of the tortoiseshell she-cat.

And the more he thought about her, the more he began to see out of her eyes. He could see her paws as she opened her eyes and looked around the medicine den. *Oh right.. I'm not back on apprentice duties yet.* Geckopaw's thoughts boomed in Whitepaw's ears. He was relieved to know she was okay. He slipped out of her thoughts and drifted off to sleep, the first good night's sleep he'd gotten since the battle.

Sunnypool was the one to wake him up the next morning, carefully nudging him with a forepaw. Whitepaw been injured during the battle, but it wasn't very bad. Sunnypool was just worried about his eye that had gotten scratched, and could possibly leave a permanent blind spot.

He padded into Sunnypool's den as the medicine cat reapplied cobwebs to Molepaw's deep wounds. He winced as he saw his brother, still unconscious from the battle. He'd barely been awake at all for the past few sunrises *I'd trade with him if I could.* Whitepaw thought. He'd take his brother's wounds, even if it meant he'd be the one in pain instead. But then he remembered Sunnypool's prophecy.

Of course I can't be in Molepaw's position. StarClan thinks I'm too important. Whitepaw thought crossly, *but my brother is more important than anything to me than any stupid prophecy.*

Sunnypool pawed over some poppy seeds to Whitepaw. "It doesn't hurt." He lied, looking over at his brother. *He needs it more.* Sunnypool sighed, exhaustion etched out on his features. "Just eat them, mouse-brain." He mewed more demandingly. Whitepaw grumbled before reluctantly eating the poppy seeds. Sunnypool applied a fresh herb poultice to Whitepaw's scratches before

sending him on his way. "Come back if your vision gets worse!" He called as Whitepaw left the den.

"Whitepaw!" Rainpaw called, standing with Amberpaw, Frostflower, and Dawntuft. "We're gonna practice our fighting skills!" Amberpaw mewed like an excited kit. Whitepaw couldn't find it in himself to be excited. *How can we practice fighting so soon after a battle?* He wanted to ask, but he didn't dare question older warriors. Especially not when Redfang walked up.

"Let's head out." He ordered, hiding a part of his tail. Dawntuft didn't fail to notice that. "Redfang, why are you hiding your tail?" She asked, trying to get a look on it. Redfang looked away, trying to hide it still. Dawntuft sighed, whispering something to Frostflower, who nodded. She went on the other side of Redfang, causing him to spin around on her. Dawntuft grabbed his tail with her teeth. Redfang gave a pained yowl. "Your tail!" Dawntuft gasped. There was a large scratch on his wound, and it looked infected! "It's fine." Redfang lied, but Dawntuft was already nudging him towards the medicine den.

"That's infected, mouse-brain! Go see Sunnypool!" She scolded him. Redfang sighed and made his way inside of Sunnypool's den, Dawntuft trotting back towards the others.

Dawntuft led the patrol with Frostflower at the back, all three apprentices in the middle of the two warriors. They stopped in the middle of a clearing. "You three, watch closely." Dawntuft instructed before looking over at Frostflower. "Pounce on me." She ordered the other warrior. Frostflower nodded, crouching down before using her hind legs in a massive leap, landing on top of Dawntuft.

"Very good!" She praised, waiting a moment for Frostflower to explain how she did it. "Ah!— So, basically, to pounce like that you have to kind of act like the cat you're pouncing on is your prey, but you need to use more force to knock them over." She mewed to the apprentices. "Amberpaw, try it on Rainpaw." Dawntuft added.

Amberpaw crouched down, her tail swaying behind her. She shifted her weight to her back paws, leaping up and pouncing onto

Rainpaw. The two littermates tumbled, but Amberpaw landed on top in the end. Dawntuft purred in satisfaction.

"Now you try it, Rainpaw!" Frostflower mewed. Rainpaw did the same thing as Amberpaw, pouncing onto her. He pretended to claw at her, but his claws were sheathed. She fake-yowled for help from Whitepaw, who chuckled a bit. He tackled Rainpaw from the side, pushing him off of Amberpaw. "Hey! No fair!" Rainpaw whined. "Focus, you three!" Dawntuft scolded, but it was obvious that she was amused as well.

"Now I'll show you how to get the other cat off of you." Dawntuft mewed, getting the apprentices attention again. Dawntuft used her hind legs to knock Frostflower off-balance, then used all four of her powerful legs to launch Frostflower off of her. The white she-cat landed clumsily on her paws. "How about you try this one, Whitepaw?" She offered politely.

Amberpaw almost immediately pounced on Whitepaw. "You can try it on me!" She meowed excitedly. Whitepaw's eyes shone with excitement as he attempted the same move as Dawntuft, using his hind legs to knock his sister off her balance and then using all of his legs to launch her off.

Amberpaw was launched off, landing on top of Frostflower. "Eek!! Sorry!" Amberpaw apologized to the warrior, quickly scrambling to her paws. Frostflower chuckled softly, standing up and pressing her nose to Amberpaw's forehead. "That's quite alright." She mewed.

Amberpaw still seemed rather embarrassed, scuffing the earth with her paws as Whitepaw and Rainpaw tried the move together as well. "Sorry, Amberpaw.." Whitepaw apologized once Rainpaw had gotten off of him, panting slightly. "It's fine!" She mewed quickly, trotting over to Dawntuft.

"We should head back to camp." Dawntuft mewed, looking up at the sky. It was past sunhigh already! "Hopefully we can catch some prey on the way back to camp!" Frostflower added.

Whitepaw followed the rest of his clanmates on the way back to camp. He was much happier after getting his mind off of Molepaw

during training, but now he was remembering his injured brother again. *What if he never makes it to be a warrior?*

Whitepaw forced the thought away. Of course Molepaw would get through this! *Right?*

10.

Half a moon had passed, and Geckopaw had gotten better. And tonight, she was going to her first gathering! Although, the only clan that RiverClan was excited to see was ShadowClan, which was odd.

"I never thought I'd be so happy to see ShadowClan!" Doveheart joked. Cedarleaf rolled his eyes. "I never thought I'd dread seeing ThunderClan." He joked as well. Geckopaw crept out of the apprentice den, trying not to run into Mosspaw. But, StarClan wasn't on her side. "How come Beaverstar would pick a *half-clan* to go to the gathering?!" Mosspaw was sure to be loud with his gossip. Luckily, Ottercrest overheard. "You know very well she is entirely loyal to RiverClan!" She rasped angrily.

Mosspaw rolled his eyes, but Thistlepaw stayed quiet. He was uninterested in whatever Mosspaw had to say. "A half-clan still shouldn't exist. She and Sandstripe should've both been exiled!" Mosspaw hissed. Geckopaw bristled at her father's name. Sandstripe was fully RiverClan, and a great warrior, too.

"Sandstripe is a great, respectable warrior!" Thistlepaw suddenly snapped. Geckopaw had never realized how much he'd looked up to her father. After all, he was a highly respected warrior. "And a traitor!" Mosspaw spat at the blind medicine apprentice.

"Stop!" Geckopaw cut in, just before Ottercrest could. She couldn't stand listening to them banter like this! "What?!" Mosspaw hissed, his neck fur bristling, "Why can't you go back to your mother in ThunderClan? Nobody wants you here!" He spat, unsheathing his claws.

Ottercrest bit down on his tail, causing him to yowl. "Enough! You're not going to the gathering tonight!" She hissed, grabbing him by the scruff and pulling him into the apprentice's den. "You can't do that!" Mosspaw yowled. "She's done it." Saffronpetal interrupted. Mosspaw's green eyes were wide as he saw the deputy. "I'll inform

Beaverstar." She dipped her head to the medicine cat before trotting away.

After Mosspaw's tantrum, Geckopaw wasn't as excited for her first gathering anymore. She sighed as she sat down next to some apprentice from ThunderClan. Mosspaw's taunting voice rang out in her ears. *See? She's even got friends in ThunderClan! She doesn't belong here with us RiverClan cats!*

But she was snapped out of her thoughts by Whitepaw padding up to her. *He's the one who saved me!* "Hey! You're Geckopaw, right? I'm Whitepaw." The white ShadowClan tom mewed. "You saved me!" Geckopaw sprang to her paws, dipping her head to Whitepaw. "RiverClan thanks you." She said.

Whitepaw looked embarrassed, scuffing the ground with his paw. "I-It was nothing. I remember seeing you on the border." He tried to change the subject from the battle. "Oh yeah! I saw you with that brown tom." Geckopaw meowed, deciding to let him change the subject. But Whitepaw's expression still saddened. "Oh, that's Molepaw. He's my brother. But he got injured in the battle." Whitepaw frowned.

Geckopaw's ears flattened with guilt. "Oh, I'm sorry." She muttered an apology. "It isn't your fault. Some stupid WindClan warrior decided to pick a fight with a cat half his size." Whitepaw would've said more, but the gathering was starting. Honeystar, Poppystar, Beaverstar, and Branchstar all stood atop the Great Oak. Honeystar spoke first.

"Prey has been running well on ShadowClan territory! We have two new warriors, Beeflight and Mudstrike!" Honeystar announced the two new warriors proudly. Beeflight and Mudstrike stood proudly next to each other, their pelts brushing together. The other clans cheered for the newly-made warriors, then Honeystar sat down and Poppystar stepped forwards.

"ThunderClan has a new warrior as well, Cherrylight!" Poppystar announced. WindClan and ThunderClan were the only two clans who cheered. "ThunderClan is strong, and prey is running well."

Was that a threat?

Poppystar sat down as Branchstar stepped forwards. "Prey is scarce in WindClan lately, but we are still strong!" He mewed, "Sagepounce has given birth to a litter of three, so we have many mouths to feed with limited prey. That is why we ask RiverClan to allow us to hunt on a small part of their territory until new-leaf." Branchstar looked towards Beaverstar, who growled in his throat.

"Leaf-bare is harsh on every clan. We've battled over the territory already, and RiverClan won. We will not give any territory to WindClan." He hissed, his tail lashing behind him. Branchstar bared his fangs, but did not argue any further.

Beaverstar finally stepped forward. "Hunting in RiverClan has been going decently, and we're strong after the battle! We shall not give territory to WindClan, or any other clans, and we thank ShadowClan for assisting us in the battle." Beaverstar announced, concluding the gathering. ShadowClan began to gather, Honeystar calling for them to head back to camp.

"I'll see you at the next gathering!" Whitepaw called before trotting over to his own clan. Geckopaw padded over to Ottercrest, who was saying goodbye to her medicine cat friends.

As they got back to the camp, Mosspaw was asleep in the apprentice's den. Sandstripe, who hadn't gone to the gathering, padded up to Geckopaw's side. "How was your first gathering?" He asked his daughter, his fur brushing against hers. Her eyes were wide with awe and excitement. "It was great!" She mewed excitedly. She'd nearly forgotten about how cruel Mosspaw was to her earlier. She was still tingling with happiness after seeing Whitepaw again. *How can a ShadowClan tom be so nice to me?* She wondered.

11.

Geckopaw woke up before Mosspaw, stretching in her nest and quickly exiting the apprentice's den. She didn't like him, and he didn't like her. Most of the clan was still asleep, except for the dawn patrol that was about to leave. "Ah, Geckopaw. You're up early." Saffronpetal mewed. Geckopaw scuffed the earth with her forepaw. "I guess Mosspaw's snoring woke me up." She lied. Saffronpetal glanced towards the warriors den, where Rushblink was still asleep.

"Why don't you join the dawn patrol, since you're up so early?" Saffronpetal asked. "Should I wake up Rushblink?" Geckopaw looked over towards the warriors den, but the deputy just shook her head. "There will be times where Rushblink isn't there with you. And besides, she's exhausted after going to the gathering last night." She mewed before dismissing the dawn patrol.

Geckopaw walked beside Doveheart, since she couldn't keep up with Cheetahleg's pace. "No wonder they call her Cheetahleg!" Doveheart panted, the short she-cat also struggling to keep up with the rest of the patrol. "She walks faster than I can run!" Geckopaw joked, stifling a purr of laughter.

"I'm not that fast!" Cheetahleg called from the front of the patrol, "You guys just have short legs!" She purred. Doveheart scoffed, pretending like she was offended. Geckopaw was laughing like a hyena, while Cedarleaf rolled his eyes— but it was clear that he was amused by the other warriors banter.

Geckopaw sniffed the air, scenting a water vole not too far off. It was next to a stream. She sniffed, able to clearly see the fish swimming around in the water. Her stomach growled. She hadn't eaten anything since yesterday.

"Hungry?" Cheetahleg teased, circling around Geckopaw like a hawk. "Yeah, I didn't have anything to eat this morning." She muttered, "I can smell a water vole from here."

All four warriors looked at her like she was a two-headed fox. "Are you sure you're not hallucinating?" Cedarleaf asked sarcastically as Doveheart and Cheetahleg renewed the border marks on the ThunderClan border.

"Of course I'm not!" Geckopaw hissed, rubbing against a tree to rub her scent on it. "Can't any of you smell it?" She asked innocently.

All three warriors tried their hardest to scent the water vole as well, but there was no prey nearby. Geckopaw sniffed the air again, able to see the water vole once more. It was sitting on a rock in the stream, nibbling on a berry. But then she saw a cat, and not one of RiverClan. "Mouse-dung!" She spat, "WindClan is on our territory!"

"Where?!" Cedarleaf hissed, unsheathing his claws. Geckopaw began to sprint towards the stream she'd seen the water vole in. Surely enough, Weaseltuft and Driftfoot of WindClan stood there, a mouse in Driftfoot's jaws. "What do you hare-brains want?!" Weaseltuft spat, unsheathing his claws.

"Get off our territory!" Cedarleaf growled. Geckopaw unsheathed her claws, her gaze sharp on Weaseltuft. *I've beat him once, I'll do it again.* She thought. "Prey thieves!" She yowled as she saw the mouse that Driftfoot was holding. "Beaverstar is being cruel if he won't allow us to hunt here! You fish-pelts want all of WindClan to starve to death, don't you?!" Driftfoot accused, flexing her claws.

Doveheart growled in her throat, Cedarleaf preparing to pounce. "I'll give you one last chance to leave our territory." He growled, but the WindClan warriors didn't budge. Doveheart must've had enough, because she finally pounced on Driftfoot. The two she-cats tumbled and yowled, fur and blood splattering across the clearing. Driftfoot dropped her mouse, which Geckopaw quickly grabbed and set aside.

Weaseltuft leapt forward, slashing at Geckopaw, and missing by just a whisker. Geckopaw hissed and swiped back at him, unsheathing her claws. She shut her eyes as her claws got entangled in short fur, finally reaching the WindClan toms skin and scratching him. He yowled and landed a blow on her cheek, dangerously close to her eye.

Cedarleaf helped Geckopaw, landing a swift blow on Weaseltuft's side. Geckopaw lunged at him, knocking him off his paws and into the air. He landed on his back, hissing in pain.

Driftfoot and Weaseltuft began to run, but Cheetahleg was faster. "Not so fast!" She called, sprinting forwards until she was in front of them, blocking their path. Geckopaw and Cedarleaf stood on either side of the WindClan warriors, while Doveheart blocked their path from the back.

"We're bringing you to our camp." Cedarleaf decided as he began to escort Driftfoot and Weaseltuft back to the RiverClan camp. Once they got there, all eyes were on them. Sorrelkit and Spottedkit's eyes were wide as they saw the WindClan warriors.

Beaverstar stepped out of his den, eyeing the patrol. "WindClan! What are they doing here?" He rasped, narrowing his blue eyes at Weaseltuft and Driftfoot. "We found them hunting on our territory." Cheetahleg explained. Beaverstar bristled, as if he were going to attack them right there, but he held back. "We'll escort them back to their territory. And I'll have a word with Branchstar." He ordered, "Geckopaw, you should go see Ottercrest. We can't have that scratch getting infected."

Geckopaw nodded, watching as Beaverstar, Cheetahleg, Doveheart, and Cedarleaf escorted the WindClan warriors back onto their own territory.

She padded into the medicine den. Ottercrest made a quick poultice and applied it to the wound before sending Geckopaw on her way. She would've gone to rest in the apprentice's den, but Rushblink caught up to her first.

"Where in the name of StarClan have you been all morning?! There is hunting that needs to be done, you know!" Rushblink sounded like a worried mother. *I wish she would've been my mother. Then I'd be a full RiverClan cat*. Geckopaw thought, still remembering Mosspaw's cruel words. "I was on the dawn patrol." She mewed, scuffing a paw against the earth. "The dawn patrol?!" Rushblink repeated, "Without me?"

"I sent her on it." Saffronpetal's mew came from behind Geckopaw. The young tortoiseshell spun around to face her. Rushblink's tone was calm, but anger burned in her blue eyes. "Alright, then. Next time, wake me up. I need to see my own apprentices progress." She mewed before padding away.

12.

Whitepaw woke up in the apprentice's den, yawning and getting up. He was almost immediately sent on a hunting patrol with Redfang, before he could even check on Molepaw. But he didn't complain, since Squidpaw was on the patrol too. His mentor, Poppystep, was demonstrating team hunting with Redfang.

"Now, Squidpaw, I know you've done team hunting before, but Whitepaw hasn't." Poppystep mewed. The young black tom nodded. Poppystep and Redfang located a squirrel, Redfang chased it and Poppystep caught and killed it.

It looked easy enough. Squidpaw and Whitepaw sniffed around, until they saw a plump toad. "I'll chase it, you kill it." The older apprentice ordered. Whitepaw nodded, getting prepared as Squidpaw approached the toad from behind. He darted forwards, and so did the toad. Squidpaw chased it towards Whitepaw, who quickly unsheathed his claws and sunk them into the thick skin of the toad.

The toad squirmed until it slowly stopped moving. Whitepaw and Squidpaw looked at each other, pride glowing in both of their eyes. "Nice job for your first time, I guess!" Squidpaw praised, trying to suppress a purr.

"I'd say so," Redfang mewed as he approached, Poppystep following just a tail-length behind. "Certainly! You didn't even catch the prey when you first did team hunting." Poppystar purred teasingly as Squidpaw rolled his eyes and huffed.

Squidpaw and Whitepaw caught a blackbird and a rat together before they headed back to camp, each of them holding a piece of prey. Poppystep proudly carried a huge sparrow that she had caught while the apprentices were training together, Squidpaw silently admiring his mentor.

Whitepaw placed down the toad in the fresh-kill pile before

bounding over to the medicine den. He saw Molepaw in a nest, Sunnypool grabbing catmint, and Molepaw coughing. *He's caught greencough!* Whitepaw realized. *How will he fight it when he's injured?!*

Toadcroak was coughing, refusing to eat any catmint or tansy. His breathing was unstable, and Sunnypool was slightly panicked. "Toadcroak, just eat it!" He ordered, but Toadcroak refused. Molepaw had eaten the herbs that Sunnypool gave him, and he was trying to get Toadcroak to eat them as well. "Come on, Toadcroak... you need to get better!" Molepaw mewed.

Toadcroak groaned and reluctantly lapped up the pile of herbs at his paws. Sunnypool sighed in relief, glancing over at Molepaw again. "Let me have a look at your paw." He mewed, lifting up Molepaw's right forepaw. His paw was completely limp as Sunnypool held it up in his own.

Whitepaw slowly sat down next to his brother. "Does it hurt?" He asked curiously. Molepaw just shook his head. "I can't feel it at all." The young apprentice admitted. *He can't feel it? It's permanently damaged, isn't it?!* Whitepaw realized with a flash of horror. He knew that his brother's only wish was to become a warrior, but he'd never be able to fight with only three legs.

"Whitepaw, I need to go out to look for any herbs the frost hasn't killed off. We'll need it if more cats catch greencough. I've already heard Smokefur and Beeflight coughing." Sunnypool sighed, "Will you look after these two? If Toadcroak's breathing gets uneven, give him coltsfoot or juniper berries." He meowed before padding off.

Molepaw looked over to Whitepaw, who was already looking for the herbs. He didn't seem to know which one was which. Molepaw limped over, grabbing some blue berries. "These are juniper berries." He mewed. Whitepaw's expression saddened. He must know he can never be a warrior.

Mudstrike entered the den, Beeflight at his side. She coughed into her paw, looking bone tired. "Where's Sunnypool? I think Beeflight's caught whitecough!" The brown warrior sounded panicked. Whitepaw knew that Mudstrike had a crush on Beeflight, but he

didn't want to admit it. "Sunnypool's out." Molepaw muttered, grabbing some green plant with a pungent scent. "Here's some thyme. You should go rest in the warriors den." Molepaw ordered. Beeflight nodded, eating the thyme and heading off into the warriors den.

"So, you can't be a warrior?" Mudstrike looked at his younger brother with sympathy. Molepaw sighed, looking down at his useless paw. "Ever heard of a three-legged warrior?" He mumbled sarcastically and bitterly.

Whitepaw looked at his brother sympathetically. He placed the tip of his tail onto his brother's shoulder. "I wish I could take your place, Molepaw. I really do." He admitted, "I'd take your wounds from you just so you could become a warrior."

Molepaw looked grateful for Whitepaw's words. "Thanks, but all I can do now is become the best medicine cat apprentice I can be." He tried to sound more enthusiastic than he really was.

Sunnypool soon returned, a few pitiful leaves of catmint in his jaws. "Sunnypool." Molepaw mewed, his tone serious. "I want to become your apprentice."

Sunnypool looked surprised, then he placed his tail tip on Molepaw's shoulder. "I know you want to be a warrior more than anything. But I'll call Honeystar, and tell her to make you my apprentice." He mewed gently.

13.

(VERY VERY SHORT CHAPTER)

Ottercrest and Thistlepaw both went to the half-moon gathering for the medicine cats, leaving no medicine cat in charge. Luckily, no cat was sick, and there were a few warriors who knew what they were doing when it came to herbs.

Geckopaw was preparing to go to sleep, but Mosspaw was waiting inside the den. His eyes were narrowed. "I don't see why I have to sleep in the same den with a cat like you." He hissed, curling up in a nest on the far side of the den. Geckopaw ignored him, choosing a nest as far away as she possibly could get.

Meanwhile, Ottercrest and Thistlepaw made their way to the moonpool. Sunnypool was there too, with a young brown tom who none of the others had ever seen before. Morningfur and Thornwhisker of WindClan were there, and Brightwing, the ThunderClan medicine cat, was approaching. Once all of the medicine cats arrived, they made their way into the cavern the moonpool was in. Sunnypool stood up, his golden fur shimmering underneath the moon.

"I know you all must be wondering who this is. This is Molepaw, my apprentice." He mewed, looking at the young tom. "May StarClan look down upon this young cat, and light his path as a medicine cat."

As Sunnypool sat down, Ottercrest stood up. "Thistlepaw, please stand up." She ordered. The white tom stood up, his blind eyes widening. "You have been my apprentice for many, many seasons now. I believe you deserve to be given your name. Thistlepaw, from this moment forwards, you shall be named Thistleheart. May StarClan look down on you, and light your path as a medicine cat." She rasped, her gray furs looking silver in the moonlight. Thistleheart dipped his head in thanks, while the other medicine cats congratulated him.

All of them each lapped up some of the water from the pool, closing their eyes and drifting off to sleep. Thistleheart opened his eyes, suddenly able to see. He could only ever see in his dreams, so he knew that he was asleep still.

Two cats with stars in their pelts appeared in front of him. Both of them were previous medicine cats, Applepool and Coralwhisker. "Congratulations on becoming a full medicine cat." Applepool mewed, a kind look in her green eyes. Coralwhisker's expression was a bit less friendly. "Yes, congratulations. But we have important news." He rasped gruffly.

"Ottercrest's time is coming to an end. But we are giving her a second chance at life. She will be reborn to Willownose in just a few sunrises." Coralwhisker's harsh gaze fell upon Thistleheart as he continued, "You are not to interfere with her destiny. RiverClan shall need two medicine cats, but Ottercrest would not live long enough."

Thistleheart's eyes went wide, his expression saddening. His mentor would die soon, and he didn't know if he was ready. "Alright.. I won't tell a soul." He promised, dipping his head. The two cats faded away, and Thistleheart's vision faded into nothingness.

But just before he woke up, a whisper rung out in his ears. *"There will come two cats, only one of your clan, with powers like no other, to end the wrath of the badger."*

Thistleheart immediately thought of Geckopaw as he opened his eyes, suddenly back at the moonpool. She had a sense of smell like no cat had ever seen before, and she hinted that she could perfectly see things far away just by smelling them.

But then, if she was the first cat, who was the next?

14.

Rushblink pounced towards Geckopaw, who dodged just in time. Not waiting for her mentor to regain her balance, she lunged at her side. Rushblink twisted, but Geckopaw managed to grip onto her back. Rushblink stood on her hind legs, shaking Geckopaw off. She landed on the ground, grunting in shock and pain. Rushblink whipped around, slamming her paws down as Geckopaw rolled away, dodging by just a whisker-length. "Very good!" Rushblink praised as Geckopaw stood up, panting tiredly.

"Rest for a moment, and then we shall continue with training." Rushblink rasped, tired from the training as well. They both lapped up some water from the stream before continuing with the training. "Now, you won't always be able to dodge the enemies attack." Rushblink mewed, pouncing on Geckopaw without warning.

Geckopaw was swept off her paws, landing on her back. Rushblink pinned her there with ease. "Now, show me how you'd get me off of you." She ordered. Geckopaw used her hind legs to kick at Rushblink's underbelly, while her forepaws pushed her off.

Rushblink was pushed off, landing on her paws. "What do you do now?" Rushblink asked as Geckopaw stood up. The young she-cat thought for a moment before springing forwards, missing her mentor by less than a tail-length. "You missed." She pointed out, "Try aga-"

Before Rushblink could finish that thought, Geckopaw lunged herself at her. She tumbled with the unsuspecting she-cat until Rushblink was pinned.

"Impressive." Rushblink mewed. Geckopaw got off of her and she stood up. "Come on now. You deserve some rest after your hard work." She beckoned with her tail for Geckopaw to follow her. The two made it back to camp, and Geckopaw went straight into the apprentice den. She was bone tired, and immediately flopped onto her side. She didn't struggle at all to fall asleep.

When she woke up, it was nearly moonhigh. She sniffed the air, and immediately smelled the pungent scent of sickness. She raced into the medicine den, leaping over Mosspaw, who was fast asleep in his nest. As she looked into the medicine den, she saw Thistleheart standing over Ottercrest. *Is she dying?!* Geckopaw thought with horror.

Ottercrest coughed, looking up at the white tom. "Thistleheart." She rasped, "There's something I have lied to you about..." Her breathing was uneven. Thistleheart's blind eyes were wide. "What?" He asked.

"Puddlefur is not your mother. I am. Long ago, Froststorm made me have kits with him..." Ottercrest was struggling as she spoke. "That was why he was exiled soon after you were born."

Thistleheart's ears pinned at the revelation. *He doesn't want to believe it.* Geckopaw realized. Thistleheart pressed his nose to her flank, his eyes clouded with grief. "Thank you for telling me." He murmured. Ottercrest took a few raspy breaths before closing her eyes, her breathing slowing to a stop.

"Goodbye, Ottercrest." Thistleheart whispered just before a yowl was heard from the nursery. Thistleheart raced into the nursery, Geckopaw scrambling after him. Willownose was giving birth to her kits!

"Stay calm." Thistleheart mewed calmly, placing a paw on Willownose's belly. "Geckopaw, go get me some borage and raspberry leaves." He ordered the apprentice. She nodded and grabbed the herbs, along with a ball of moss that she'd dipped in water.

Willownose's first kit was already being born. Geckopaw rushed over with the herbs, giving them to Thistleheart, who gave her a nod of thanks. "Here, eat these." He gave Willownose a bundle of herbs. She just barely managed to swallow the herbs. She sunk her teeth into the moss ball as Thistleheart licked the first kit to warm it up.

He realized it was a small brown she-kit. *Welcome back into the world, mother.* He thought.

As the second kit slithered out, Violetwing helped Thistleheart warm it up. "You have one she-cat and one tom." Thistleheart mewed kindly. Willownose was panting, the kits latching onto her belly to suckle.

Once their fur had dried and fluffed up, the sun had already risen. Nettlethroat, the father of the kits, was by Willownose's side. "Look at this little one." He pointed to a small brown she-kit. "She looks just like Ottercrest."

"We should name her Otterkit. In honor of her." Willownose mewed. Nettlethroat nodded, then looked at the second kit. "He looks just like you." Nettlethroat purred, sniffing the small white tom. Willownose purred in amusement. "I want to name him Cloudkit. His fur is puffy and white, just like a little cloud." She purred, running her tongue along both of her kit's fur.

"They're beautiful." She mewed. Nettlethroat licked Cloudkit, Otterkit, and then Willownose's foreheads. "They get it from their mother." He purred. Willownose flicked him over the ears with her tail, chuckling softly. "You're such a mouse-brain." She mewed lovingly.

Cloudkit pushed Otterkit to the side a bit as he suckled. Willownose pulled them apart with her tail so they could both eat. "Now, now. There's plenty of milk to go around." She licked her kits, her eyes shining with adoration. "You two will make great, strong warriors one day." She whispered to them.

Thistleheart heard this, and poked his head into the nursery. "Is your milk running alright?" He asked politely. Willownose nodded. "Yes, I'm doing just fine." She meowed calmly. Just before Thistleheart could leave, she spoke again. "Don't you think they'll make two fine warriors when they grow up?" She asked. "Of course they will. You've got two healthy kits on your paws." Thistleheart soothed, casting a glance to Otterkit.

But Otterkit won't become a warrior. Her destiny is to be a medicine cat. He thought before leaving the nursery.

15.

A storm roared just overhead the ShadowClan camp. Whitepaw was asleep next to Rainpaw in the apprentice's den when suddenly—

Lightning struck. Whitepaw shot up out of his nest, hearing the branches of a tree falling nearby.

"FIRE!" Some cat yowled. Immediately, a red glow just outside the apprentice's den caught Whitepaw's eye. Squidpaw and Berrypaw, the two older apprentices, rushed all of the younger ones out. Sunnypool was helping Molepaw, who still wasn't used to walking on only three paws.

Whitepaw rushed over to Toadcroak, who was limping out of the camp. His two back legs hardly worked anymore, so it'd definitely be a rough trip. Whitepaw and Flywhisker pressed their flanks against his side, assisting him with walking. Flywhisker sniffed the air, her blind eyes staring off into nothingness. "Thank you, Whitepaw." She mewed as she helped Toadcroak out of the camp.

Flywhisker, Toadcroak, and Smokefur were the first ones out. Honeystar had forced Smokefur to go out first, since he was nearly too old to be a warrior anyways. "Everyone out!" Honeystar yowled once only warriors and warrior-apprentices were left in the camp.

Honeystar did a headcount once every cat was out. "Where's Rainpaw?!" Cloveryawn wailed, looking around for her sister's kit. There was a loud, pained yowl from the camp. Whitepaw shut his eyes tight until he felt heat all around him. He opened his eyes, flames surrounding him. *Rainpaw!* Whitepaw called out for his brother. "Help me!" Rainpaw wailed, flames licking greedily at his paws as he tried to escape.

Whitepaw opened his eyes, racing back into the camp. He hardly heard the yowls of Dawntuft and Cloveryawn behind him. He managed to squeeze through a small gap in between a huge fallen branch and the medicine den entrance. "Rainpaw?!" He heard

coughing, but he could hardly see through all the smoke.

"Whitepaw!" Rainpaw rasped. He slowly came into Whitepaw's vision. Whitepaw grabbed his brother by the scruff, pushing him through the space he'd come through before squeezing through it himself.

The two littermate's raced through the camp entrance, a blazing branch falling just behind them. The ShadowClan cats all ran towards the RiverClan border, crossing it as fire lapped at the pines behind them. They crossed the stream, now on RiverClan territory. A moonhigh patrol spotted them.

"What in the name of StarClan is all of ShadowClan doing here?!" Nettlethroat hissed, his neck fur standing up. Rustleheart flicked him over the ears. "Don't you see there's a fire?" He asked sarcastically. Nettlethroat shifted his paws awkwardly, seeming embarrassed.

The two warriors led the entirety of ShadowClan to their camp, where Honeystar made some negotiations with Beaverstar. "You all can stay for one night. We have no elders, so the warriors will sleep there instead. Your apprentices can squeeze in with ours, and elders and medicine cats with rest in the medicine den, along with your injured cats." He said. "We only have one injured." Sunnypool mewed, carrying Rainpaw, who'd passed out, into the RiverClan medicine cat den.

Whitepaw slowly and quietly crept into the medicine cat den. His eyes locked onto Geckopaw. He froze up, each hair on his pelt feeling hot with embarrassment. Amberpaw didn't seem to notice, sitting down in a random nest. "Is it alright if I sleep here?" Whitepaw asked self-consciously as he walked into the nest next to Geckopaw.

"Of course!" She purred politely. Squidpaw and Berrypaw curled up next to each other, huddling together. Their discomfort of being in the RiverClan camp was evident. Whitepaw, however, felt safe next to Geckopaw.

Mosspaw eyed all of the ShadowClan cats, growling a bit before

turning around and curling up with his tail over his nose.

Geckopaw curled up in her nest. Next to her, Whitepaw was tense as he laid down. Geckopaw ran her tail down his spine to comfort him. After just a little while of this, he fell asleep quickly.

When dawn came, it wasn't Mosspaw's loud snoring that woke Whitepaw up, but it was Geckopaw instead. She was nudging him with her forepaw. "Come with me." She whispered. Whitepaw yawned as he stood up, stretching his legs. Geckopaw led him out of the camp, then towards the half-bridge on RiverClan territory. "I just wanna ask something." She took a breath, "Are we friends?"

Whitepaw's eyes widened when she asked the question. He knew he wasn't supposed to have a mate from another clan, but was it wrong to just be friends? Surely it couldn't be! "I... I think so." He murmured.

Geckopaw didn't speak for a few moments. And then she gave him a friendly lick on his ear. "Thank you." She purred gratefully. "Don't you have friends in RiverClan, though?" He asked curiously, not realizing how insensitive it seemed. Geckopaw shook her head. "Not really. I was friends with Ottercrest before she died. I don't know if Thistleheart likes me very much. Rushblink is my mentor and Sandstripe is my dad." Her mew was laced with sorrow.

"What about your mother?" Whitepaw blurted without thinking. "She's a ThunderClan cat. Spottedfall. And if you ask me, she isn't my mother." Geckopaw muttered grimly. He put his tail-tip on her shoulder. "If it makes you feel any better, I never knew my mother either." He attempted to comfort the she-cat.

Geckopaw would've said more, but Cloveryawn found them first. "Whitepaw! Where've you been?! ShadowClan is heading home!" She scolded him like she was his mother, picking him up by the scruff. Whitepaw twisted and writhed until his paws hit the ground again. "I'm not a kit, and I'm not *your* kit!" He spat before spinning around angrily, racing off.

Cloveryawn looked hurt, her green eyes welling with grief. Geckopaw scoffed. She knew what it was like to have some cat act

like she was your birth mother when she wasn't. *Poor Whitepaw. He's the only cat who understands me.* She thought.

ShadowClan made it to their end of the border. Luckily, the whole forest wasn't burnt. It was only the camp and a bit of the surrounding area. The smoke had cleared out. Honeystar leapt up onto the Shaderock.

"We will rebuild the camp, starting with the elders den and nursery! Sunnypool and Mudpaw, you two start on the medicine den. Rabbitspring, Stungface, Mudstrike, and Beeflight, you all rebuild the nursery. Dawntuft, Poppystep, Redfang, Frostflower, and Squidpaw, you will rebuild the elders den." Honeystar announced, "The rest of you will go on hunting patrols."

As she leapt down from the work, every cat began to disperse. Whitepaw and Amberpaw went out hunting together, while the other cats worked on rebuilding. By the end of the day, the elders den and nursery were in well enough condition for cats to sleep there. Warriors slept outside while apprentices squeezed themselves into the nursery to sleep.

Whitepaw was bone tired after a long day of hunting. He flopped down onto the side and got the best sleep he'd had in moons.

16.

Today was Mosspaw's final assessment, and oddly enough, Geckopaw was hoping he'd pass. She didn't want to be stuck in the apprentices den with him any longer! She'd get the whole den to herself for a little while, until Sorrelkit and Spottedkit were made apprentices. At least she wouldn't have to be afraid of those two being in the same den as her!

By the time Geckopaw woke up, Mosspaw was already out doing his assessment. Otterkit was following Thistleheart around like she was his shadow. *She must really want to be a medicine cat*. Geckopaw thought.

"Geckopaw!" Her father's call snapped her out of her thoughts. Sandstripe trotted towards her, a friendly smile on his face. "Would you like to come hunting with me?" He offered. "Of course!" Geckopaw nodded. She couldn't stand another moment of being in the camp! And she could smell a few fish swimming about in the stream.

Once they got out of the camp, cold air bit at their noses and ear-tips. "I'm surprised the streams haven't frozen over yet!" Geckopaw joked as she began padding towards a stream. She crouched down over the lake, making sure the fish wouldn't see her shadow hovering over the water. She swiped her paw into the water, hooking a fish on her claws and pulling it out of the water. She didn't hesitate to give it the killing bite before placing it on the ground.

"I'm afraid our prey will freeze if we leave it out here for too long!" Sandstripe murmured, half-jokingly. "I'll just carry it with me while you catch something." Geckopaw decided, picking up the fish again.

Sandstripe opened his mouth to taste the air, but seemingly couldn't sense anything. *All he can taste is freezing air!* Geckopaw realized, but she could smell prey all around the forest. She could even smell ShadowClan and ThunderClan from here. *How can't he even smell*

one bit of prey? She wondered. Surely she couldn't have a better nose than her own father!

"Follow me." She mewed, "I can smell a squirrel crossing over from ThunderClan territory." She began leading the way towards the squirrel. "How do you know what it's doing?" Sandstripe asked, looking baffled. "Can't you?" She asked. Sandstripe was quiet.

Surely enough, nearby the ThunderClan border was a squirrel. Sandstripe easily caught it, but a ThunderClan patrol showed up. "That's ThunderClan prey!" Some apprentice yowled. Geckopaw recognized his flame-colored pelt easily. *That's Flashpaw!* She remembered him from the battle.

"It's crossed over the border." Sandstripe mewed challengingly. "And I caught it. It's RiverClan prey now." He hissed with his ears pinned. "It's still ThunderClan prey. Flashpaw was chasing it." A mew came from the back of the patrol. A tortoiseshell she-cat, almost identical to Geckopaw, stepped to the front of the patrol. *Spottedfall!* Geckopaw's heart sank as she saw her mother.

Sandstripe unsheathed his claws when he saw his former mate. Before either of them could say anything, Flashpaw leapt over the border and tumbled with Geckopaw. She pushed him off of her with her hind legs, scrambling to her paws. He launched for her, but she swiftly dodged. *You want a fight that badly?!* She wanted to hiss, but the words didn't reach her mouth. She unsheathed her claws and scratched Flashpaw's shoulder. He spat in return, lunging again, but Geckopaw was faster. She bounced onto her hind legs, dodging the blow and falling on Flashpaw's back.

"Stop!" Sandstripe yowled, breaking apart the fight. Spottedfall just stood there, her blue eyes glaring down at Geckopaw. "How can you stand by and watch your kits fight?!" He spat at Spottedfall.

"I only have two kits." She hissed, unsheathing her claws. "And that is Flashpaw and Tangledpaw." Geckopaw's eyes widened with realization. Flashpaw was her half-brother! "Come on, Flashpaw. We can find something better than that dumb squirrel." Spottedfall mewed, glaring at Geckopaw before trotting off with her son following just a tail-length behind.

Sandstripe glanced at Geckopaw sympathetically. "I'm sorry you have such a cruel mother." He murmured, his green eyes full of sadness. Geckopaw looked back at him with a hard stare. "She isn't my mother." She muttered darkly before heading back to camp.

The first snowflakes began to fall as Geckopaw and Sandstripe went back to camp. They placed their prey in the fresh-kill pile as Beaverstar called a meeting.

"Mosspaw has completed his final assessment." He announced, looking at Rustleheart, signaling for him to speak. "Mosspaw did very well on the hunting portion of his assessment. He caught a fish, a very clean catch." Rustleheart began, "And during his team hunting, he and Cheetahleg caught a shrew and a water vole. The shrew was a bit of a messy catch, but they caught it in the end."

Mosspaw's green eyes shone with pride. Beaverstar looked at him before speaking. "Then he shall be made a warrior!" He mewed. The crowd erupted into a quick cheer before Beaverstar silenced them.

Beaverstar let out a cough into his paw before beginning the ceremony. "Mosspaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend your clan, even at the risk of your own life?"

"I do!" Mosspaw mewed excitedly, practically beaming. "Then I call upon my ancestors to look down on this apprentice and acknowledge his hard work to learn the ways of your code. Mosspaw, from now on you will be known as Mossgrowl. StarClan honors your bravery and determination." Beaverstar could hardly get through the naming ceremony before cats started to yowl and cheer. "Mossgrowl! Mossgrowl!" Geckopaw couldn't help but join in on the cheering. She was happy for him, even if he wasn't the kindest to her.

When Geckopaw stepped into the apprentices den, she found herself feeling relieved that Mossgrowl could no longer torment her, even when she was bone tired and ready to sleep. *Thank StarClan I'll see him less!* She thought as she made herself comfy in her nest. And for the first time since she was in the nursery, she slept like a kit.

17.

Whitepaw had been an apprentice for three whole moons. Redfang had to be the best mentor ever! Rainpaw and Amberpaw were doing great, though they got into trouble ALL the time. Autumnpaw was training with Rainpaw and Frostflower, since Smokefur had come down with whitecough. Honeystar and Stungface were sick, too. Greencough had already taken one of Honeystar's lives, leaving her on only two.

Whitepaw went out hunting on his own, since Redfang and Dawntuft had gone out hunting together. He was hunting near the RiverClan border when he caught a vole. He was about to carry it back to camp when he heard rustling from the ShadowClan border.

His neck fur fluffed up and he arched his back to make himself look bigger. However, it wasn't just any RiverClan cat. It was Geckopaw!

"Great StarClan, Geckopaw! You scared me!" Whitepaw dropped his vole on the ground so he could greet his friend. "Sorry!" She apologized, an amused purr rumbling in her throat. She sniffed the air before looking behind her. "Patrol!" She hissed, "Meet me again here tonight. Right after moonhigh patrols return."

Whitepaw's eyes were wide when she could smell the patrol from so far away. He certainly couldn't. "Alright." He whispered back, picking up his vole. "I'll see you tonight." He muttered before racing off into the undergrowth.

By the time it was sunset, Whitepaw could hardly bear to stay in camp any longer. He devoured his fresh-kill before going to bed early. Honeystar had given him permission to go to sleep early after catching four pieces of fresh-kill on his own that day.

Whitepaw opened his eyes to see a pale gray cat with raggedy fur and a scar on their cheek. Their paws were black and they had a striped tail— like a raccoon. Half of their face had no fur on it, and one of their ears was almost completely missing. Their gray pelt

looked as if the sky was reflecting in it. "Hello, little one." A gruff, raspy mew came out, "I'm Raccoonleg."

He looked at the unfamiliar she-cat. "I was the ShadowClan medicine cat a long, long time ago." She rasped. Another cat emerged from the sky, this time a golden tom with big amber eyes. "Sorry I'm late." He mewed, "I'm Goldenspirit."

"Why have you come to me?" Whitepaw asked, looking up at the two StarClan warriors. "Because we need you to know something. It's about you and Geckopaw." Raccoonleg meowed. "You two are the two cats destined to end the wrath of Badgerhiss!" Goldenspirit interrupted, excitement glowing in his amber eyes.

Whitepaw's eyes stretched wide. "But Badgerhiss is my father!" Whitepaw urged, "He would never do anything to hurt me or ShadowClan!" He tried to convince them that they were wrong, but they were already fading away. His eyes teared up. "You're mistaken!" He wailed, but they were gone. The floor beneath him faded away and he fell. But he wasn't awake yet. He splashed into a wave of cats charging towards the clans. He watched in horror as Badgerhiss stood atop the Great Oak, yowling for an attack.

"Let's head out." Rabbitspring mewed to the moonhigh patrol, the sound of them leaving waking Whitepaw up. He was still quivering from his dream, but he waited for the patrol to return. Once they were all asleep in their nests again, Whitepaw raced to the RiverClan border.

Geckopaw was waiting there for him. Her green eyes lit up when she saw his white pelt nearing. "There you are!" A wave of relief flooded over her. "I thought you wouldn't come." She admitted.

"Of course I came!" Whitepaw purred, hoping to soothe her anxieties. "Follow me." She mewed, turning around and beckoning with her tail for Whitepaw to follow. They went to the abandoned Greenleaf twolegplace. They hid underneath it, where no cat would ever see them.

Geckopaw turned to him. "Did you have the dream too?" She asked, her big green eyes shining like emeralds, "The one from StarClan?"

Whitepaw nodded, his own eyes widening. Was she really the other cat? "What's your power?" He blurted, his eyes gleaming curiously. "I think it's my sense of smell." She said, sniffing the air. "I can see things from far away by smelling them." She explained. "Really?" He asked, looking around. He ran a bit away, now out of sight.

Geckopaw sniffed the air. Whitepaw was back over the ShadowClan border in a holly bush. He dug a hole in the dirt before kicking the dirt back into the hole and putting a few dead leaves on top of it. Once he was back, Geckopaw immediately explained exactly what he did.

"You dug a hole behind a holly bush and then kicked the dirt back into the hole, then placed a circle of dead leaves around it." She mewed. "Wow!" Whitepaw sounded amazed, "Let me show you my power."

He shut his eyes tight. *Geckopaw?* His voice suddenly rang out in her ears, but his mouth didn't move. Geckopaw looked at him with amazement. "We really do have powers!" She mewed excitedly. Whitepaw opened his eyes and looked at her, the same expression of excitement on his own face.

"But it's not gonna be all like this." Whitepaw murmured grimly. "StarClan says we have to fight Badgerhiss..." He looked down at his paws. The thought of battling his own father made him feel sick. Geckopaw put the tip of her tail on his shoulder. "We'll be ready." She mewed soothingly. The sun was beginning to rise, and snow was beginning to fall.

"We should go." She squeezed out from underneath the shack. Whitepaw nodded in agreement. "I'll see you around." He meowed before heading towards ShadowClan territory. He quietly slipped into camp and into his nest, getting just a quick nap before having to go out training.

But every moment of that meeting had been worth it, even if it meant being bone tired during the day.

18.

Honeystar coughed into her paw, looking weary and tired. Greencough would most likely take another one of her lives, dwindling her down to one. Sunnypool gave her some more catmint, but she didn't seem to get any better.

Molepaw forced himself out of his nest, limping on three paws. Badgerhiss had called a clan meeting early in the morning, and Sunnypool had made Molepaw wake up. "Mudstrike has news for you all." He mewed calmly. Mudstrike stood up, along with Beeflight at his side. "Beeflight and I are mates, and she's going to have my kits in less than a moon!" He announced proudly.

Badgerhiss looked proud of Mudstrike, and then cast a sidelong glance at Molepaw. He could never have kits because he would become a medicine cat. *Is he angry with me?* Molepaw wondered.

"Beeflight will be moved into the nursery and excused from her warrior duties until her kits become apprentices." Badgerhiss spoke over the cheering cats. Beeflight nodded, padding into the nursery once Badgerhiss dismissed the meeting. Sunnypool trotted over to Molepaw.

"Would you go out and fetch some cobwebs? We're running low." He asked. Molepaw nodded, "Of course." He mewed before limping out of the camp. While he was out, he couldn't shake the feeling that he was being followed.

Molepaw collected some cobwebs on a stick. While he was busy, he didn't notice the bushes rustling behind him. Badgerhiss crept out of the undergrowth, his yellow eyes fixated on Molepaw. His claws were unsheathed. Molepaw spun around, limping on three legs.

"What are you doing?" Molepaw asked defensively, looking at Badgerhiss's unsheathed claws. "What I should've done a long time ago." Badgerhiss growled under his breath. He lunged onto Molepaw, digging his claws into his son's shoulders. "I'm getting rid

of you! What use are you to me if you'll never be a warrior?!" Badgerhiss spat as Molepaw desperately tried to wriggle out of Badgerhiss's grasp.

Molepaw gasped for air as Badgerhiss sunk his claws into his neck. "Why are you doing this?!" He wailed, unsheathing his claws. In a desperate attempt to fight back, he swiped his claws at Badgerhiss's chest. He only managed to rip out a few pieces of fur. Badgerhiss's yellow eyes burnt into him like the sun. "Pathetic." He hissed.

"I will never call you my son." He spat, pushing his claws deeper into Molepaw's neck. "You never should've been born! Pearlface would still be here if it weren't for you." He raised his massive forepaw, hesitating for just a heartbeat before swiping his claws, slitting Molepaw's throat open.

The light in the young apprentice's eyes went out as he took his last gasp of air. His blood splattered onto Badgerhiss's fur as he glared down at the corpse. He fetched some fox dung to hide his scent on the body, then washed his fur off.

"No cat will know how you really died." Badgerhiss spoke to the sky before leaving the scene behind.

Redfang was taking Whitepaw out on patrol when they smelled the fox-dung. "Fox!" Whitepaw gasped, unsheathing his claws on instinct. Redfang opened his mouth to taste the air. "It tastes somewhat stale. The fox is gone, but still could be on territory." He muttered, crouching low to the ground. Whitepaw did the same, following Redfang as he stalked forwards.

As they approached the scent, Whitepaw could recognize ShadowClan as well. *Some cat must've already been here.* He assumed, unprepared for what awaited him past the undergrowth. Redfang pushed past the bushes with his forepaws and immediately froze. Whitepaw poked his head through as well, his heart dropping, and then breaking. There lay Mudpaw, covered in blood with his brown fur tangled in itself. Whitepaw ran forwards.

"Mudpaw!" He wailed, shaking his brother with his forepaws. But he was long gone— his throat slit open. "Wake up!" He pleaded, but his

attempts were no use.

Redfang pressed his nose to Whitepaw's shoulder, the young white toms grief hitting him like a wave. "We should bring his body back to camp and alert Honeystar that there's a fox in our territory." He muttered, his own eyes welling with grief.

Whitepaw grabbed Molepaw by the scruff, carrying his smaller littermate back to camp. Sunnypool immediately took the body into his den, and Badgerhiss called a clan meeting. While Honeystar coughed next to him, Whitepaw helped Sunnypool decorate the body with lavender to stop it from smelling so foul.

"We haven't detected any fox-scent before today. It's quite odd." Honeystar pointed out in a raspy voice. "That *is* quite odd." Sunnypool agreed as he gave her some tansy leaves. Whitepaw looked closely at Molepaw's claws. In between them were dark brown fur— darker than his own. It looked like Badgerhiss's fur!

"There's brown fur between his claws!" Whitepaw blurted. "It wasn't a fox that did this." Whitepaw's ears pinned to the back of his head. StarClan had warned him, and he still failed to protect Molepaw. *His death was all my fault.*

Honeystar gasped for air as she looked at the fur. "It was Badgerhiss!" She gasped. Sunnypool tried desperately to calm her down. "Breathe!" He begged, pressing his paws against her belly to help her. She gasped—

And then she stopped breathing. After a few heartbeats, her breathing slowly began to return. Whitepaw held his own breath. "Did she lose a life?" He asked, his blue eyes wide with terror. Sunnypool nodded solemnly. "She's on her last." He whispered as she slowly blinked open her eyes.

"I can't believe—" She was interrupted by a painful cough. "You should rest." Sunnypool advised before looking at Whitepaw. "And you should go mourn with your siblings." He mewed. Whitepaw nodded and joined Rainpaw and Amberpaw, who were sitting anxiously outside of the medicine den.

Suddenly, the scent of fox invaded the camp. "Mouse-dung!" Badgerhiss whispered to himself. Whitepaw heard his thoughts ring out in his ears. *That fox dung I used must've led a fox here!*

19.

A mangy, orange-pelted fox burst through the camp entrance, snarling as it leapt down into the clearing. Berrypaw was the first to dart forwards and attack. "Mange-pelt! You killed him! Molepaw is dead because of you!" She wailed, but the fox just hissed.

Berrypaw charged forwards, attacking its back leg and knocking it off-balance. "Berrypaw!" Squidpaw sprinted after his sister. He attacked the fox's other back leg, while Rabbitspring and Redfang attacked its muzzle. Rainpaw and Amberpaw yowled at it, scratching at its eyes in an attempt to blind it.

"Berrypaw, what were you thinking?!" Squidpaw snapped as he landed a swift blow on the back of the fox's leg. "I loved him, Squidpaw!" Berrypaw wailed as she furiously bit down on the fox's leg. It kicked, launching her onto its back.

Berrypaw hooked her claws into its tangled fur as it twisted in order to keep herself from falling off. The fox spun around and attacked Squidpaw, nipping at his ear. He dodged in time, landing a scratch on its muzzle. It hissed and stepped on his tail, pinning it down with its claws. Squidpaw yowled, trying to escape, but his tail ripped in the process. The bone snapped and blood began flowing from the middle of his tail. Berrypaw gasped, anger rushing through her. "No!" She yowled.

Dawntuft dived to grab Squidpaw by the scruff, pulling him out of the way. She ran to the medicine den, dropping him off in there as Sunnypool began tending to him.

Berrypaw felt anger pulsing through her. She raked her claws along the fox's back as it writhed to get her off. Blood splattered over her brown pelt. The fox twisted, flinging her off. It kicked at the warriors on its legs before running out of the camp.

"Frostflower, Summerprowl! Help me chase it off clan territory!" Badgerhiss yowled before chasing after the fox. The two she-cats

raced after him.

There was a yowl from the medicine den. Berrypaw bounded inside, her eyes wide as she saw Squidpaw in a moss nest, but half of his tail next to Sunnypool. "Squidpaw!" She looked at his half-tail. It was a gruesome sight. Sunnypool grabbed some cobweb and wrapped it around the end of the tail stump.

"I'm okay." Squidpaw reassured, Honeystar standing up. Her legs were a bit shaky, but she left the medicine den. "Honeystar!" Sunnypool called after her, but she didn't listen. She hopped onto the clan rock, calling weakly for the clan. "All cats whose claws are sharp enough to—" She was interrupted by a brief coughing fit, "..fight for the Clan, gather beneath the rock for a Clan meeting!"

Slowly, cats began gathering. Squidpaw sat next to Berrypaw, who glanced at the remaining half of his tail. Whitepaw sat next to him. "Does it hurt?" The young apprentice asked sheepishly. Squidpaw nodded.

"Squidpaw and Berrypaw, step forwards." Honeystar rasped. The two exchanged an excited glance before stepping into the clearing. "You two fought like warriors in the battle with that fox, and it is time you were made warriors." She continued.

The two straightened, their eyes brightening. "Poppystep and Springfoot, do you accept these apprentices to become warriors?" Honeystar looked towards their mentors. They both nodded. "They deserve it." Springfoot mewed.

"Berrypaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend your clan, even at the risk of your own life?" Honeystar looked at the young she-cat. "Of course." She breathed, her blue eyes shining brighter than ever. "I call upon my ancestors to look down on this apprentice and acknowledge her hard work to learn the ways of your code. Berrypaw, from now on you will be known as Berryfang. StarClan honors your skill in battle and spirit." Honeystar then looked at Squidpaw.

"Squidpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend your clan, even at the risk of your own life?" She repeated the

question. "Yes! Absolutely!" The tom replied enthusiastically. "I call upon my ancestors to look down on this apprentice and acknowledge her hard work to learn the ways of your code. Squidpaw, from now on you shall be known as Squidfur. StarClan honors your strategy and resilience."

"Squidblaze, Berryfang!" The crowd erupted into a loud cheer. Redfang and Dawntuft were the loudest, their yowls easily heard over the rest of the warriors. Honeystar hopped off the rock and padded back into the medicine den.

That night, as Whitepaw trotted into the apprentice den, Berryfang and Squidblaze sat in the clearing to sit their vigil. He closed his eyes, reaching out into Badgerhiss's mind. He was just outside the medicine den, watching as Sunnypool gave Honeystar a bundle of herbs before bed.

Mouse-brains! Badgerhiss thought, *they have no clue I've poisoned the herbs.* Whitepaw's eyes shot open. Badgerhiss walked away from the medicine den, a victorious look on his face. There was a harsh cough from the medicine den, then ragged, desperate-sounding breathing. Whitepaw rushed into the medicine den— but he was too late. Honeystar lay lifeless on the den floor.

No! Whitepaw wanted to wail to every cat in the forest that Badgerhiss was a murderer, but who'd believe him? He had no proof. And Badgerhiss was going to become ShadowClan's leader.

20.

Mossgrowl yawned as he awoke in the warriors den. Even after half a moon, he wasn't used to sleeping in there. He was used to the apprentice's den, only one other cat in there with him. The warriors den was much more cramped, cats asleep in nearly every tail-length.

Geckopaw wasn't used to it either. She was so used to his snoring next to her, lulling her to sleep. But now remained nothing but a harsh, heavy silence. She wouldn't wake up to him stepping on her tail, or batting at her ears. And oddly enough, she missed it. She felt lonely without him, even after countless moons of waiting for him to move into the warriors den so she wouldn't have to deal with him for a while.

As Mossgrowl was about to go out hunting by himself, Beaverstar called a clan meeting. He slipped out of the camp, not caring much for whatever it was.

"Violetwing's kits have reached the age of 6 moons, and will now become apprentices!" Beaverstar announced. Spottedkit and Sorrelkit both rushed into the cleaning, bouncing with excitement. "Cedarleaf and Doveheart, step forward." He looked at the two young warriors, who looked at each other excitedly before stepping forward.

"Sorrelkit and Spottedkit, you have reached the age of six moons and it is now time for you two be apprenticed. From this moment until you receive your warrior names, you will be known as Sorrelpaw and Spottedpaw. Your mentors will be Cedarleaf and Doveheart." Beaverstar mewed.

Sorrelpaw smashed her nose against Cedarleaf's, causing him to flinch back for a moment. Spottedpaw calmly pressed his nose against Doveheart's, giving her shoulder a gentle lick.

"Sorrelpaw, Spottedpaw!" The clan cheered for the two new

apprentices. Geckopaw was relieved that she wouldn't feel so lonely in the apprentice's den any longer. Beaverstar dismissed the meeting. "Come on," Cedarleaf mewed to Sorrelpaw, who excitedly followed him.

Doveheart beckoned with her tail for Spottedpaw to follow, then she glanced at Geckopaw. "Come on, Geckopaw. Rushblink said you should teach them some of what you've learned." She meowed, her mew as gentle as a feather. *How can she be friends with someone as snappy as Cedarleaf?* Geckopaw wondered, but shook the thought away.

"Okay!" Geckopaw's tail flicked behind her excitedly. Doveheart caught up with Cedarleaf, who was heading towards the ThunderClan border. Sorrelpaw and Spottedpaw shared a look of awe. "Wow!" Sorrelpaw gasped, amazement glittering in her eyes. She looked towards the moor, "Do ThunderClan cats really hunt in all those oaks?"

Cedarleaf nodded, looking down at his apprentice. Spottedpaw sniffed at the border, wrinkling his nose as he smelled ThunderClan's sharp, odd-smelling scent. "How do they live with such a musty-smelling forest all around them?" He asked, putting his paw over his muzzle.

"They complain about our scent all the time!" Doveheart purred, clearly amused by the two young cats. "No way!" Sorrelpaw's whisker's twitched with disbelief. "I didn't believe it either." Geckopaw chimed in, glancing at Doveheart for approval to speak. The white she-cat nodded.

"Now, take a good sniff at the border! You'll need to know the other clans scents." Geckopaw instructed. Spottedpaw did as he was told as soon as he was told to do it. "Surely no cat knows *all* the clan scents by heart!" Sorrelpaw blurted. "I'm sure Geckopaw could scent ShadowClan from inside our camp!" Cedarleaf joked as Doveheart stifled a purr of laughter.

"Wow! Really?" Sorrelpaw's eyes shone with admiration. *It's only because I'm apart of the prophecy.* Geckopaw thought, but she held her tongue. No cat was to know about the prophecy, especially

some young apprentice!

"Not really." Geckopaw cast a glare at Cedarleaf, but he just shrugged. He stood up, about to lead the patrol away before a rustling came from the other side of the border.

A small calico she-cat tumbled out of the bushes, spitting as a huge gray tom scratched the sides of her flank. The she-cat was flung onto RiverClan territory. "ThunderClan!" Spottedpaw observed. The rogue flung himself onto the ThunderClan she-cat again, biting at her neck. He missed by just a claw-length.

Geckopaw felt anger flare up in her. She didn't know the ThunderClan cat, but she flung herself at the rogue anyways. He yowled and swung at her throat, but she swiftly dodged it.

Spottedpaw gasped, about to go help, put Sorrelpaw stopped him. Doveheart unsheathed her claws and scraped them along the rogue's side, while Cedarleaf bit at his neck, not enough to kill him, but just to scare him.

The mangy gray cat pushed himself away from the battle and began to run away. "And stay off of clan territory!" Geckopaw yowled after him. She sniffed the air, following his scent until she was sure he was gone.

"Thank you..." The young ThunderClan she-cat rasped as she stumbled to her paws. "Let's escort her back to her camp." Cedarleaf mewed to Doveheart, who nodded. "Geckopaw, you take Spottedpaw and Sorrelpaw back to our camp." She mewed before helping Cedarleaf pick the ThunderClan apprentice up.

Geckopaw turned around and started heading towards the camp. "Come on. We'll tell Saffronpetal what happened." She meowed. The two younger apprentices eyes lit up.

"*We'll* get to report to Saffronpetal?" Sorrelpaw chirped excitedly. Geckopaw nodded, speeding up her pace a little.

These two are gonna think this happens all the time at borders! She realized, remembering this was only their first time out of camp.

But she couldn't be bothered to tell them as they entered the camp. *It should be Doveheart and Cedarleaf's job to tell them that.* She reminded herself.

"Where are Doveheart and Cedarleaf?" Saffronpetal asked as the three apprentices entered the camp alone. "A rogue attacked us at the ThunderClan border!" Sorrelpaw blurted. "He was attacking a ThunderClan cat." Geckopaw shot a glare at Sorrelpaw.

"Geckopaw was very brave. She fought it off!" Spottedpaw was quiet, his voice full of admiration. "Cedarleaf and Doveheart helped me." Geckopaw murmured. "But you were the first to attack." Sorrelpaw looked up at her, the same look of wonder in her eyes. "Anyways, Cedarleaf and Doveheart are helping that ThunderClan cat back to her camp." Geckopaw scuffed the ground embarrassedly.

Saffronpetal just nodded. "I'll go inform Beaverstar." She meowed before trotting towards the leader's den.

Geckopaw could feel her belly rumbling, and knew that Spottedpaw and Sorrelpaw must've been hungry as well. "Let's go get something to eat." She mewed to the two, who excitedly rushed towards the fresh-kill pile.

"Do you think tomorrow we'll learn how to hunt?" Sorrelpaw asked Geckopaw, who's ears suddenly felt hot. "I mean, it's up to your mentors." She murmured. She wasn't used to younger cats looking up to her like this.

Mossgrowl emerged from the warriors den, a look of jealousy in his green eyes. "You two have no need to admire Geckopaw so much. She isn't even a warrior!" He spat. "But she's super cool!" Sorrelpaw argued, her light green eyes glowing with admiration.

"You wouldn't think the same if you knew the truth about her." Mossgrowl hissed, his voice low. *No!* Geckopaw wanted to wail to stop him, but her voice was caught up in her throat. Spottedpaw tilted his head. "Geckopaw? What truth?"

Mossgrowl lowered his voice further, every word laced with venom. "She's a half-clan disgrace. Blood split between two clans. She

doesn't belong here any more than a fox belongs in a nursery."

Sorrelpaw's eyes widened, her ears flattening. "But... Geckopaw trains just like we do! She's loyal!" She argued. "Loyal?" Mossgrowl spat, tail lashing. "Cats with two clans' blood can never be loyal to either. When the time comes, she'll betray you both—because that's what half-clan cats do. I've seen it before."

Spottedpaw shifted his paws uneasily. "But Violetwing said—"

"Violetwing is blind," Mossgrowl snapped, interrupting Spottedpaw. His eyes gleamed cold in the fading light. "I'm telling you what the senior warriors won't: watch her carefully. One day her heart will tear this Clan apart."

Sorrelpaw and Spottedpaw exchanged an uneasy glance before stalking into the apprentices den, like a pair of scared kits who'd believed a nursery tale.

"Why would you tell them that?!" Geckopaw snapped, *it's not true!* The second part didn't even reach the tip of her tongue. She followed the other two into the apprentice's den.

Geckopaw's chest heaved. She wanted to tell them—wanted to claw apart the lies Mossgrowl had spat into their ears—but fear cinched her jaws shut. If she denied too much, would they only believe him more? If she confessed, would she lose them forever?

Her claws dug furrows into the moss. "You *know* me," she hissed, voice cracking. "I'd give my last breath for this Clan. Don't let Mossgrowl's poison twist your heads."

But the two apprentices only shifted uncomfortably, their tails twitching, the seed of doubt already rooted too deep.

Geckopaw sank back into her nest, curling in on herself, the fire in her eyes dimming. *Why does his word matter more than mine?*

21.

The island clearing buzzed with voices as cats from every Clan poured in, pelts brushing and tails twitching. Moonlight streamed through the bare branches above, silvering the crowd.

The full moon seemed duller than usual after Spottedpaw and Sorrelpaw had started to avoid Geckopaw.

Geckopaw padded close behind her mentor, trying to keep her head high though her paws felt heavy. She could already feel eyes on her —the whispers about her blood carried sharper than any claw. Mossgrowl's words still clung to her like burrs: *half-clan disgrace.*

She squeezed into the mass of apprentices, flinching when a ThunderClan tom muttered something she couldn't catch. Then, through the throng, she saw him.

Whitepaw.

His white pelt glowed against the other pelts of ShadowClan, his pale blue gaze flicking toward her the instant she looked his way. It wasn't long before the crowd swallowed him again, but that heartbeat of recognition sent warmth flooding her chest.

"Geckopaw!" Spottedpaw called, nudging her side. "Come on, sit here." Sorrelpaw's ears pinned as she looked suspiciously at Geckopaw. "I don't want to sit with a half-clan!" Sorrelpaw protested. Spottedpaw swiped her over the ears. "She's loyal! You were following in her pawsteps before you found out she's half-clan!" He scolded.

"It's fine." Geckopaw murmured, pushing past the crowd of cats to sit somewhere by herself. A tail brushed hers, quick and subtle. She froze, fur sparking. "Whitepaw!" She greeted her friend.

He purred, licking her cheek gently. Every cat shared tongues under the full moon, so why couldn't they?

Geckopaw's throat tightened, her gaze fixed firmly on the leaders above as if nothing were amiss. Yet beneath the blanket of stars, with dozens of cats around them, their tails remained just barely touching.

For a moment, the jeers and suspicion of her Clanmates faded, replaced by a quiet warmth that only Whitepaw could spark. But as she caught Mossgrowl's scathing glare across the clearing, dread clawed at her belly.

If he notices... if anyone notices... Still, she didn't pull away.

The clan leaders began speaking, and Geckopaw finally noticed that Badgerhiss was there instead of Honeystar. Anxiety sparked in her belly. He was the last to speak.

"Honeystar died a few sunrises ago, which means I have taken her place as Clan leader. I've claimed my nine lives and chosen Redfang as my deputy." He announced, standing tall. Redfang lifted his head proudly.

Geckopaw looked at Whitepaw, who was clawing at the ground. "He can't be clan leader!" She hissed into his ear. Whitepaw sighed. "But he is." He muttered, looking down at his paws. Saffronpetal was calling for the RiverClan warriors to gather and head home.

"Meet me tonight. Same spot as usual." Whitepaw hissed into her ear, sure to keep his voice down. She nodded. She didn't care if she'd be exhausted in the morning. "I'll be there." She promised quietly.

That night after the gathering, the moon still shone brightly over the camp. She slipped out of her nest, sneaking out of camp. She headed towards the abandoned Twolegplace, her eye quickly catching Whitepaw's pelt. The two small cats slipped underneath the building. "I'm glad you came." Geckopaw admitted.

"Of course I came." Whitepaw reassured her as snow as white as his fur began to fall outside. Yet they were warm underneath the Twoleg nest. Whitepaw padded closer, brushing his tail just near enough for their whiskers to touch. "I couldn't stop thinking about

you after the gathering. The way Mossgrowl glared at you—like you didn't belong—" His lip curled. "It made me want to shred his ears off."

Geckopaw ducked her head, warmth stirring in her chest despite the cold night air. "They'll never let me forget what I am," she murmured, claws scraping the dirt. "Half-Clan. The cat who doesn't belong.

Whitepaw brushed his pelt against hers. "Then let them sneer. They don't know you like I do. You're braver than any of them. Stronger, too." His blue eyes shone with undisguised affection.

For just a heartbeat, Geckopaw felt that she could believe him. The sun rose, though clouds hid it. It began snowing harder. "Our clans will begin waking up soon." She muttered. She sniffed the air. "Mouse-dung!" She hissed, "Rustleheart and Sandstripe are heading our way!"

"They'll scent me!-" Whitepaw began, but before he could finish, Geckopaw pushed him down into the reeds, her pelt pressed tight against his. The damp stalks closed around them, muffling their scents, but their closeness made her heart hammer even louder than the approaching warriors.

"Keep still," she whispered, her muzzle brushing his ear. She shut her eyes and sniffed the air again, able to perfectly picture Sandstripe and Rustleheart. They were busy chatting as they approached.

"It's impossible to smell any prey out here!" Rustleheart complained, to which Sandstripe nodded. "Maybe we should go back and get Geckopaw. She can smell anything, even in this cold!" He seemed to sound proud of his daughter.

Please don't! Geckopaw's heart started thudding even louder. Sandstripe and Rustleheart passed by the reeds, the conversation shifting to something about when they were apprentices.

Geckopaw let out the breath she'd been holding once they were out of earshot. "That was too close." She muttered.

Whitepaw turned his head, their whiskers brushing in the narrow space between them. His voice was low, fierce. "I'd risk closer for you." He promised as he began to sneak his way back towards the ShadowClan border.

Her ears burned, her heart stumbling in her chest—but even as warmth swelled in her, fear twisted through it. *How many more times can we risk this?*

22.

"All cats whose claws are sharp enough to fight gather beneath the rock for a Clan meeting!" Badgerstar yowled. Cats began to gather, Amberpaw and Rainpaw looking up admiringly at their father. Whitepaw, however, knew the way his father came to be clan leader. He knew what really happened to Molepaw.

"You all know ShadowClan has been in need of more warriors since Honeystar and Smokefur died of greencough," Badgerstar began. *But she didn't die of greencough!* Whitepaw wanted to yowl to the whole forest. "And since Autumnpaw no longer has a mentor, I've decided he's ready to become a warrior." Badgerstar finished, causing Summerprowl to spring up to her paws.

"But he hasn't been training for six moons!" She objected. "Five moons is plenty of time! He's ready." Badgerstar bared his fangs, causing Summerprowl to sit down. "Autumnpaw, step forwards!"

Autumnpaw looked unsure for a moment, but then he stepped forwards. "Do you promise to uphold the warrior code, and defend your clan, even at the cost of your own life?" Badgerstar asked. Autumnpaw nodded. "I do!" He mewed excitedly. "From this moment forward, you shall be known as Autumnleaf. StarClan honors your determination and skill in hunting." Badgerstar announced.

"Autumnleaf!" The crowd of cats began to yowl, as if they didn't have a problem with the early end to his apprenticeship. Whitepaw reluctantly joined in the cheering.

Honeykit, Flamekit, and Mottledkit watched curiously from the nursery. Beeflight ushered them back into their nest, glaring at Badgerstar for a few heartbeats. "The warrior code says that an apprentice must train for at least six moons..." Amberpaw murmured quietly, but no cat other than Whitepaw heard it.

She's really loyal to the warrior code. Whitepaw thought. *Would she*

think of me differently if she knew about Geckopaw? Surely not! Me and Geckopaw are friends... nothing more.

Whitepaw sighed, turning to his sister. "I know. But Badgerstar has made his decision." Whitepaw looked down at his paws. "It's not right." Amberpaw murmured, her claws sinking into the snowy ground beneath her. Redfang called for Whitepaw. "Sorry, I've gotta go." He stood up and joined Redfang.

The two went to the training hollow. Redfang sighed. "Badgerstar insists I show you this fighting move, but just know I don't like it." Redfang sounded miserable. Whitepaw gave a sympathetic look. *He's already hurting our Clan!*

Whitepaw was snapped out of his thoughts when Redfang lunged at him, twisting his foreleg behind his back. He yowled in pain, then Redfang let go. "It's an easy way to snap a cat's arm. Badgerstar said we should start using it in battle." He frowned, and then snarled. His claws dug into the soft earth beneath him.

"Well then let's practice it! It's a good move, even if I hate to admit it." Whitepaw tried to sound more enthusiastic than he really was, "If we start using it, the other clans will catch on as well."

"We need a way to get out of it, then!" Redfang realized. His eyes shone with pride as he looked down at his apprentice. His mood seemed to be lifted. "Put me in the lock." He ordered. Whitepaw hesitated, then nodded. He pounced onto his mentor's back, teeth gritting as he twisted Redfang's forepaw behind him, mimicking the move.

Redfang let out a hiss, his shoulder straining as the pressure tightened. "Good—hold it!" he ordered through clenched teeth. He shifted his weight suddenly, rolling onto his side and jerking his paw in a sharp twist.

Whitepaw was thrown off balance, tumbling into the dirt with a grunt. Redfang sprang back to his paws, shaking out his foreleg with a soft wince. "It's painful to get out of, but it works." Redfang looked pridefully at Whitepaw, whose eyes glittered.

Whitepaw shook dirt from his pelt, his shoulder still sore from the throw. He glanced at his mentor, unease prickling in his chest. "Redfang... do you really think this move is right for us to use? I mean, it's not just claws and teeth. It could cripple a cat forever." Whitepaw pictured Molepaw's limp, preventing him from ever being a warrior. And he died before he could even become a medicine cat.

Redfang froze, the light in his eyes dimming. For a long moment he said nothing, just stared at the ground, his tail lashing slowly.

At last, he muttered, "No. It isn't right." His voice was low, ragged, as though the words had clawed him on their way out. He dug his claws into the earth, sending clumps flying. "But Badgerstar gives an order, and the rest of us follow. That's what it means to be loyal to our Clan."

Whitepaw shifted uneasily. "But... what if his orders hurt the Clan more than they help it?"

The question hung between them like a thorn, sharp and dangerous. Redfang's head snapped up, eyes blazing. For a heartbeat, Whitepaw thought he had gone too far.

"You're braver than you know, asking that," Redfang said quietly. He sat down heavily, his fur bristling against the cool breeze. "I can hardly believe that Badgerstar is your father sometimes." Redfang admitted.

Whitepaw was quiet for a few moments. Redfang was more like a father to him than Badgerhiss was. After all, his mate, Dawntuft, had been the one who kitted him.

The shadows stretched long as Redfang flicked his tail toward the trail. "Come on. If we're gone too long, Badgerstar will start asking questions."

Whitepaw padded after him, his pawsteps heavy with thought. Every ache in his foreleg reminded him of the move, and how wrong it'd feel to use it.

The camp's bramble walls rose ahead, the scent of ShadowClan washing over them. Cats lifted their heads as the two entered, eyes sharp and curious.

"Good training?" Dawntuft called, rubbing up against her mate's flank. Redfang bared his teeth in a half-snarl that passed for a smile. "Whitepaw's improving. He'll be tearing ThunderClan pelts before long."

A few approving chuckles rippled through the clearing. Whitepaw forced a proud flick of his ears, though his belly churned. *If they only knew what we practiced...*

Badgerstar himself stood near the leader's den, speaking with Mudstrike. His gaze slid to Whitepaw for just a moment—sharp, piercing, enough to make the apprentice's paws itch.

Whitepaw quickly lowered his head in respect, though his heart pounded. He wondered if Badgerstar could somehow *smell* the doubt clinging to him, the way fear-scent hung on prey.

"Go on," Redfang muttered beside him, his voice low enough that only Whitepaw heard. "Eat. Rest. You've worked hard. And remember what I told you."

23.

The forest was still when Badgerstar slipped across the ThunderClan border, his paws silent in the pine needles. He found the ThunderClan tom waiting by a hollow oak, scars crisscrossing his muzzle.

"You took a risk coming here," the tom muttered, eyes flicking nervously toward the trees.

"I took a risk saving your life, too, Boulderslide." Badgerstar reminded him, his voice smooth and cold. "Or have you forgotten the day some rogues had you cornered? You'd be crow-food if I hadn't pulled them off."

Boulderslide's ears twitched, shame flashing in his eyes. "I haven't forgotten."

"Good," Badgerstar said. He stepped closer, his yellow gaze burning. "I need you now. Your Clan drags you down, led by a fool who mistakes mercy for strength. But I know your worth. When battle comes, you'll fight beside me. You owe me that much."

Boulderslide swallowed hard. "And if my Clan calls me traitor?" He challenged. "Then they'll fear you," Badgerstar growled. "Better feared as a warrior than pitied as prey."

The ThunderClan tom didn't answer, but his silence was enough. Badgerstar turned away with a flick of his tail, the debt called in. "Whatever battle comes, Ryewhisker and I will stand by your side." Boulderslide promised himself and his mate.

Badgerstar padded to the water's edge. A gray tabby she-cat emerged from the reeds, her eyes sharp as claws.

"You," she hissed. "The last cat I want to see."

"You mean the last cat your leader wants you to see," Badgerstar

corrected, his whiskers twitching. "But you... you've always been overlooked, haven't you? Cast aside while others claim the glory."

Her fur bristled. "Don't pretend you know me, Badgerstar."

"I don't need to pretend, Fernshine. I saw the way your own Clan left you to fight alone at the riverbank. How they let you bleed while they fled." His voice softened, almost kind. "Wouldn't you rather fight with cats who will *use* your strength, not waste it?"

Fernshine's claws tore at the mud, her anger warring with the lure in his words.

Badgerstar leaned closer, his shadow long against the water. "Join me. When the forest bends, you'll rise higher than those who spat on you. Power, prey, respect. It'll be all yours. All you have to do is say yes."

Her gaze wavered, bitterness flickering into something dangerously close to hunger. She didn't give him her answer right away, but she didn't turn him away, either.

"Just think, Fernshine! Together, we can make a clan of solely strong, powerful cats! No more weak mouse-hearts. And you will have the respect that you deserve." Badgerstar's eyes shone like the sun. Fernshine glanced behind her, then back at Badgerstar.

She flexed her claws. "Fine. But if you don't keep your promise, I'll take your nine lives myself." She spat out her threat, then stalked back into the reeds.

As the moon began to set, Badgerstar stalked back into the camp. He curled in his nest, sleeping, satisfied with his work. He decided he would visit WindClan in the morning.

It wasn't until sunhigh when Badgerstar woke up. He quickly called a clan meeting. "I'm going to WindClan to have a word with Branchstar. Cloveryawn and Autumnleaf, you will come with me." He ordered before leaping down off the rock.

Autumnleaf and Cloveryawn would be easy to sway, since they were both his own warriors. As they began walking along the

lakeside, Badgerstar spoke.

The moorland stretched wide under the sun, golden grasses rippling like waves. Badgerstar padded at the head of his small patrol, Autumnleaf and Cloveryawn silent behind him. Ahead, a slim brown tom stood waiting on the rise, his long legs and sharp ears unmistakable.

"Badgerstar," Branchstar called, his tone wary but polite. "What brings ShadowClan across the border? This isn't a Gathering."

Badgerstar dipped his head in a shallow nod, yellow eyes gleaming. "No, it isn't. That's exactly why I asked to meet in private."

Branchstar's tail flicked. "Then speak quickly. My warriors won't like me standing here long."

Badgerstar stepped closer, lowering his voice until only the four cats could hear. "The forest is rotting, Branchstar. You've seen it — leaders too soft, warriors too slow. Prey runs, and they hesitate. Rogues claw our borders, and they offer them mercy." His lip curled. "Mercy. It will be the death of us all."

Branchstar's ears twitched, but he didn't interrupt. Badgerstar's claws flexed into the earth. "I've already spoken with cats from ThunderClan and RiverClan. Cats who understand what I mean. Cats who know the time has come to fight for something greater than these broken Clans. A forest ruled by strength, not weakness."

Branchstar narrowed his eyes. "You're talking about war."

"I'm talking about survival," Badgerstar corrected smoothly. "There will be battle, yes. But not without reason. Together, we can cut down the feeble and build a future where only the worthy stand. WindClan's speed, ShadowClan's cunning, ThunderClan's strength, RiverClan's skill... imagine it. No borders. No divisions. Just power."

Cloveryawn's tail lashed with excitement behind her, but Autumnleaf stayed rigid, silent. Branchstar's gaze darkened. "And if I refuse this... vision of yours?"

Badgerstar's voice dropped, dangerous and quiet as the slither of a

snake. "Then WindClan will be left behind. Alone. And when the battle comes, you'll find yourself fighting not one Clan, but many."

The moorland wind whipped around them, tugging at Branchstar's fur. His silence stretched long, heavy as stone.

Badgerstar leaned closer, his yellow eyes glinting like fire. "Think carefully, Branchstar. You can be part of the new forest, or you can be trampled beneath it."

Branchstar flexed his claws, glaring at Badgerstar. "Fine. WindClan will fight by your side, but I cannot promise all of my warriors will agree with me. Whichever side they fight on, I will be on ShadowClan's side." He agreed.

"The preparations must begin quietly," Badgerstar said, voice low and commanding. "We cannot alert the other leaders too soon. Boulderslide and Fernshine are already ready to follow, and soon, others will fall in line. You, Branchstar, will keep your Clan in check... at least until it's time."

Branchstar's ears twitched. "I will. But if this goes wrong—"

"It will not," Badgerstar interrupted, voice hard as stone. "Victory belongs to the strong, and we are stronger than the forest has ever seen."

The three ShadowClan warriors and Branchstar stared at one another across the moor, the wind tugging at their fur. In that tense silence, every cat understood: the forest was about to change, and when it did, nothing would remain the same.

24.

Geckopaw woke up to the sound of whispers, though it was still dark outside. She stuck her head slightly out of the apprentice's den to see Fernshine, Puddlefur, and Nettlethroat. "We must join his side, or RiverClan will be crushed beneath his paws!" Fernshine urged.

Who's 'he'? Geckopaw had a feeling she already knew, but she didn't want to believe it. "I've seen what he can do. He's fought five rogues single-pawed." Nettlethroat admitted.

"Then I will join you, if it means safety for our clan." Puddlefur mewed, though her blue eyes glittered with guilt. *It's not safety for the clan, it's safety for you!* Geckopaw wanted to scream at her.

Fernshine turned to Nettlethroat. "Please join our side. I can't lose you. Not to the paws of Badgerstar." She begged. Nettlethroat shared an unsure glance with Puddlefur, then reluctantly nodded. "I will fight by his side, if that's what it means to be loyal to my clan."

It's not being loyal! How can you be so dumb? Geckopaw felt hot with anger. But then it subsided into sympathy. *He doesn't know the truth like how I do.* She told herself. Sorrelpaw shifted in her nest, yawning as she woke up. She could hardly blink the drowsiness out of her eyes before she glared at Geckopaw.

"What're you doing, spying on Fernshine, Puddlefur, and Nettlethroat?" Sorrelpaw hissed, her eyes narrowed, "You're plotting against us, aren't you? You're gonna run back to ThunderClan and tell them all about our secrets!"

Geckopaw's ears burned with fury. "I wasn't spying!" she snapped, though her voice cracked. "I woke up and heard them talking, that's all!"

"Convenient," Sorrelpaw sneered, tail lashing. "You're Half-Clan. Everyone knows your loyalties are split. What better excuse than 'I

just happened to overhear'?" Geckopaw flinched, claws digging into the den floor. She wanted to protest, to yowl the truth so loudly the entire camp would hear, but the words stuck in her throat.

Sorrelpaw's loud accusations woke Spottedpaw up. "Sorrelpaw, do you hear yourself?" He stood up and pressed his side against Geckopaw's defensively, their fur brushing against each other's. "She's been loyal to RiverClan longer than we've been alive!"

Sorrelpaw bristled. "I'm not making excuses. I know what I heard—"

"You heard nothing," Spottedpaw cut her off with a glare. "Stop blaming her just because you're mouse-brained enough to believe every shadow has fangs."

For a heartbeat, Sorrelpaw's scowl faltered. Then she snapped her jaws shut and whipped around, curling back into her nest with a huff. The den fell into silence again, broken only by Sorrelpaw's tail angrily thumping the moss.

Geckopaw's pelt prickled with unease. She wanted to thank Spottedpaw, but her throat was tight, clogged with words she couldn't say. He didn't know about Badgerstar. He didn't know that Fernshine's whispers were dragging RiverClan into a war that could tear everything apart.

Before Geckopaw could respond, Fernshine's voice drifted into the den, cool and sharp as ice. "Spottedpaw, Sorrelpaw, Geckopaw. Your mentors want you out training soon. You'd better be ready."

The three apprentices froze, their pelts prickling. Had she heard? Fernshine's gaze lingered on Geckopaw for a heartbeat too long, unreadable in the dim light, before she turned away.

Geckopaw's heart pounded. She couldn't shake the thought that every cat in the Clan was already choosing sides, and she wasn't sure how long she could keep standing on the edge before someone pushed her into the endless pit of war.

Rushblink was waiting for Geckopaw at the camp entrance. "There you are, slow mole!" Doveheart chirped from beside her.

"Spottedpaw and Sorrelpaw, we'll be out hunting at the stream." Cedarleaf mewed, beckoning with his tail for the younger apprentices to follow. Geckopaw was relieved she wouldn't have to be around Sorrelpaw. Rushblink stood up, beckoning with her tail for Geckopaw to follow her.

"Let's hunt near the Greenleaf Twolegplace." She mewed. Geckopaw thought back to her secret meetings with Whitepaw. *I sure hope she doesn't scent him.* Geckopaw's paws pricked with worry as they approached. She sniffed the air, while Rushblink opened her mouth to taste it. "I can't taste anything with all this snow!" Rushblink shivered, the snow on her fur making her look more like a cloud than a cat.

Geckopaw shook snow off her pelt, sniffing the air again. She closed her eyes, able to see a scrawny mouse crawling through the snow. She crouched down low, her gaze fixating beneath the Twoleg nest.

She stalked towards the mouse, but was unable to pounce with the Twoleg nest above her. The mouse perked up. *I'm not going to lose this catch!* She charged forwards, sliding through the snow on her belly and extending her paws. She hooked the mouse on one of her claws and pulled it towards her, giving it the killing bite.

"I'm surprised you can smell anything with this snow." Rushblink sounded impressed as Geckopaw carried the mouse in her jaws. Her stomach grumbled— she hardly remembered that she didn't eat that morning. But she ignored it.

Geckopaw just shrugged, knowing that she couldn't tell Rushblink about her powers. "Your nose must be even better than Willownose's!" Rushblink continued, clearly not sensing Geckopaw's discomfort. "Really, they ought to call you Scentpaw!"

Geckopaw gave her chest fur an embarrassed lick. "Really, it's nothing." She murmured, glancing to the side. Rushblink just shrugged. "I'm gonna see if I can catch anything. You should bring that back to camp."

"Okay." Geckopaw sniffed the air. At the lake, a shrew was eating anything it could find under the snow. "Try near the lake." She

advised before trotting off. She could feel Rushblink's gaze lingering on her for a few moments too long.

25.

The moon hung high above the camp. Whitepaw couldn't sleep for the past few nights, and decided to go see Sunnypool. Just before he could leave the apprentices den, he caught sight of a brown pelt leaving the leaders den. *Badgerstar!*

Whitepaw nearly sprang out of his nest, but then he realized how dangerous it would be to follow Badgerstar, wherever he was going. Instead, he curled up in his nest and shut his eyes. He reached out his senses to Badgerstar. His father was sneaking out of camp and heading straight towards WindClan! There on the moor, a few warriors emerged.

Whitepaw recognized Branchstar, a cream-colored tom, but that was about it. A dark brown tabby tom emerged as well, followed by a blueish-gray she-cat, a white fluffy tom, and a small tabby she-cat who looked to be an apprentice.

"These are my most loyal warriors." Branchstar mewed. "It's good to see you, Hawkjaw." Badgerstar dipped his head to the dark-furred tabby tom. "Ah, and you must be Sheepcloud and Driftfoot." Badgerstar's gaze landed on the apprentice.

"That's Horsepaw." Branchstar meowed. Whitepaw couldn't believe what he was seeing. Badgerstar was already collecting recruits for his battle! And a clan leader, too! "You've collected a fine bunch of warriors, Branchstar." Badgerstar mewed, "Soon enough, the forest will belong to the strong!"

Whitepaw was suddenly back in the apprentices den, eyes wide and his fur fluffed up. *He can't do this! I won't let him!* His claws flexed into his nest.

Whitepaw's heart thundered in his chest. He buried his muzzle into his nest, trying to quiet his breathing before any of his littermates stirred. The moss felt suffocating, and yet he dared not move.

Badgerstar was building an army, and not just from ShadowClan. From all of the forest. *Is he collecting cats from ThunderClan and RiverClan, too?*

His mind flashed back to the sight of Branchstar standing beside his father, WindClan cats swearing loyalty like it was nothing. A chill ran down his spine. Soon the forest will belong to the strong, Badgerstar had said. *And the cats deemed weak will be killed*. Whitepaw realized.

Whitepaw pressed his claws deeper into the moss, his thoughts tangling like brambles. Should he tell Sunnypool? If anyone could understand, it would be him.

But then another thought struck, sour and sharp: if Sunnypool didn't believe him, or worse—if he repeated Whitepaw's words—Badgerstar would know. And then Whitepaw wouldn't just feel powerless. He'd be deemed a traitor.

A rustle in the den made him freeze. Amberpaw shifted in her sleep, her tail brushing his flank. Whitepaw forced his eyes shut, though his mind raced like prey fleeing across the forest floor.

The forest will belong to the strong.

Not if I can help it, Whitepaw vowed silently. But the vow tasted bitter in his throat. He was only an apprentice. What chance did he have against ShadowClan's leader, against his own father?

He swallowed hard, pushing the fear back. Somehow, some way, he would tell Sunnypool. He had to. Even if it cost him everything.

Whitepaw crept from the apprentices' den, ears swiveling at every sound. His paws felt heavy, as if each pawstep dragged him deeper into danger.

Sunnypool's scent drifted from near the warriors' den, fresh and sharp. Whitepaw padded closer until he spotted the golden-furred tom stretched out just beyond the entrance, tail curled around his paws. Sunnypool's eyes flicked open before Whitepaw even spoke.

"Whitepaw?" His voice was low, steady. "Can't sleep?"

Whitepaw's throat tightened. He hesitated, glancing back at the shadows of camp. "No, w-well yes.. but, that's not why I'm here. I... I need to talk to you."

Sunnypool sat up, studying him with those calm, deep blue eyes. "Then talk."

Whitepaw shuffled his paws, claws scraping the dirt. "It's about Badgerstar." He muttered, glancing anxiously, as if the whole of ThunderClan were listening in on him.

Whitepaw drew in a shaky breath. "He's—he's planning something. A battle. Not just with ShadowClan—he's collecting cats from other Clans. I saw him with Branchstar tonight. There were WindClan warriors with him. Apprentices, even." His words tumbled out in a rush, his chest tight. "They're going to fight for him. He said the forest will belong to the strong."

"And the weak will be left to die." Sunnypool's ears pinned. He was the only other cat who knew of the prophecy, but he didn't yet know of Geckopaw. "Whitepaw, you must find the other cat from the prophecy, and fast."

Whitepaw's claws dug nervously into the soft floor of the den. "Er—well.. I already have." He admitted. *Will he believe that it's a cat from another clan?* Whitepaw thought nervously. Sunnypool's blue eyes went wide. "Who is it?" He urged.

"Geckopaw.. from RiverClan." Whitepaw watched closely for Sunnypool's reaction. "And you both know you're the cats from the prophecy?" He asked. Whitepaw nodded.

Sunnypool's tail lashed once, betraying the storm beneath his calm face. "StarClan help me!" he muttered, almost too low for Whitepaw to hear. His gaze snapped back to the apprentice, anger glittering faintly in his eyes. "Do you realize what you've done, Whitepaw? Meeting with a RiverClan cat—Badgerstar would call that treachery if he even *scented* it on your fur."

Whitepaw flinched but lifted his chin. "I don't care. StarClan chose us for a reason. Geckopaw believes it too. If this prophecy means

anything, then we can't just stand by and watch our Clans tear each other apart."

For a long moment Sunnypool said nothing. The silence pressed heavier than any scolding. Finally, he sighed, shoulders lowering, though his eyes stayed wary.

"Then listen carefully," Sunnypool whispered. "If you and Geckopaw truly are the cats of the prophecy, StarClan won't make the path easy for you. There will be blood, betrayal, and worse. You cannot tell anyone else, not even the apprentices you share a nest with. Do you understand?"

Whitepaw swallowed hard and nodded. "I understand."

Sunnypool leaned closer, his whiskers brushing Whitepaw's ear. "Then you and Geckopaw must prepare. Watch, listen, and learn. Every step Badgerstar takes, every ally he gains—we need to know it. If the forest is to survive, you two may be the only ones who can stop him."

Whitepaw's heart pounded in his chest, torn between fear and a flicker of courage. He thought of Geckopaw's green eyes glinting in the moonlight, and he forced himself to breathe steady.

"I won't let him win," he whispered. "Not while I'm alive."

Sunnypool gave a grim nod. "Then StarClan must be right about you. I know they are." His blue eyes softened again. "I want you to meet her tomorrow night."

26.

Whitepaw crept through the undergrowth, every step of his paws echoing with Sunnypool's warning. The night was cool, the stars sharp and cold above. His ears twitched at every sound, terrified that Badgerstar—or worse, one of his father's allies—might be trailing him.

By the riverbank, a slender shape waited, her tortoiseshell pelt dappled silver in the moonlight. Geckopaw flicked her tail as he approached, though her eyes were shadowed.

"You finally made it," she whispered.

"Barely," Whitepaw admitted, settling beside her. The rush of the river drowned their voices, but his heart still pounded. "Geckopaw... it's worse than we thought. Badgerstar's already got WindClan cats on his side. A whole group. Even their leader."

Geckopaw's breath caught, her claws scoring the earth. "He's got RiverClan warriors, too. Fernshine, Puddlefur, and Nettlethroat." She stared at the rippling water, her face twisted. "How can we stop him, Whitepaw? We're just apprentices. He's a leader. Leaders don't die until their nine lives are taken."

For a long time, neither spoke. The night pressed in, heavy and suffocating. Whitepaw dug his claws into the grass, forcing himself to meet her gaze.

"We *have* to stop him," he whispered fiercely. "If we don't, the Clans will destroy each other. Sunnypool told me the same thing: it has to be us. No one else can know. Not yet."

Geckopaw's eyes widened. "You told Sunnypool?"

Whitepaw nodded, guilt prickling under his fur. "He already knew about the prophecy. He didn't seem surprised—just... afraid. Afraid for us."

Geckopaw took a sharp breath, her tail lashing against the dirt. "Good. Then at least we're not completely alone." But then her voice dropped again, almost breaking. "Still... how do two apprentices fight against a leader? Against entire Clans?"

Whitepaw pressed his tail against hers, a small touch of reassurance. "We'll find a way," he murmured, though fear gnawed at his belly. "We have to."

The river gurgled beside them, carrying their promise away under the stars.

"We need warriors. A group as big as Badgerstar's." Whitepaw muttered, his blue gaze wide as he looked at Geckopaw. "I know Rainpaw, Amberpaw, and Mudstrike will be on my side, and Squidfur, too. Berryfang will side with her brother, and I don't think Redfang approves of what Badgerstar is doing." Whitepaw thought over all the warriors in his clan, "But Redfang is the only senior warrior in that group..."

"Spottedpaw will be on my side. And Nettlethroat is only doing it because he thinks it's what's right. If I can convince him otherwise, he'll be on our side too. Sandstripe would be on my side as well." Geckopaw felt guilty when she had much fewer cats from her own clan to help.

Whitepaw shifted uneasily, his claws tugging up tufts of damp grass. "That's not many," he admitted, his voice low. "Not compared to Badgerstar and Branchstar. And if he's reaching into ThunderClan and RiverClan too..." His ears flattened. "We'll be torn apart before we even get a chance."

Geckopaw flicked her tail against his shoulder, though her eyes were heavy with the same doubt. "We can't think like that. Every cat who joins us makes us stronger. It doesn't matter if it's five or ten—we can grow." She hesitated, then added, "And maybe some cats won't choose until the battle actually comes. If they see Badgerstar's true nature, they might turn."

Whitepaw let out a sharp breath. "Or they'll be too scared to. You didn't see the way those WindClan cats looked at him, Geckopaw.

Like he was already their leader. Like he could promise them the stars themselves." He shuddered, remembering the fire in Badgerstar's eyes.

"Then we show them another way," Geckopaw insisted, though her voice cracked with the weight of her own fear. "We can't match his claws, but maybe we can match his words. Make them see what he really wants."

Whitepaw stared at her, his heart tightening. She looked so determined, even when her whiskers trembled. "You're right," he muttered finally. "We'll have to be smart. Careful. Build our group in the shadows, like he does. And when the time comes..." His gaze hardened. "We'll be ready."

The river glimmered in the moonlight, carrying their quiet vow away on its endless current. Two apprentices against a leader, and yet somehow, it felt like the start of something greater.

27.

A moon had passed, and Beeflight's kits were now four moons old. Badgerstar was in the nursery with her. "They will become apprentices, now!" He snapped. Beeflight unsheathed her claws, her kits behind her in their nests. Mudstrike burst through the entrance of the camp. "What's going on?" He demanded.

Mottledkit looked towards Honeykit. "I've never seen Mudstrike so angry..." He whispered to his littermate. "I haven't seen Beeflight so angry either." She whispered back, looking towards her parents.

"Mudstrike, these kits are more than ready to become apprentices. Make your mouse-brained mate see that!" He spat. Mudstrike unsheathed his claws, anger glittering in his eyes. "How dare you?! Just because they're your grandkits doesn't give you the right to make them apprentices early!" He spat back at his father.

"I'm your leader! They will become apprentices, so get them ready for their ceremony." Badgerstar's lip curled to reveal his fangs. Mudstrike snarled as he leapt onto the clan rock.

"All cats whose claws are sharp enough to fight, gather for a clan meeting!" Badgerstar yowled across the clearing. Once every cat was gathered below him, he beckoned for Mottledkit, Honeykit, and Flamekit to come forwards.

The three kits shared an unsure glance before hesitantly, and slowly, stalking forward. "I've decided that ShadowClan kits shall become apprentices at four moons from now on. Any who shall object to this can speak to me later." Badgerstar looked down upon his grandkits.

"Mottledkit, Honeykit, and Flamekit have all reached the age of four moons." He mewed, "Mottledkit, from this moment until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Mottledpaw. Your mentor will be Mudstrike. I wish that he passes down what he learned from me onto you."

Mottledpaw slowly padded towards Mudstrike, pressing his nose against his father's. He licked his shoulder before they both sat back down.

"Flamekit, from this moment until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Flamepaw. Your mentor will be Berryfang. She is one of our bravest warriors. I wish that she passes down her bravery and strength onto you." Flamepaw pressed his nose to Berryfang's, then gave her shoulder an excited lick.

"And finally, Honeykit. From this moment until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Honeypaw. Squidfur will be your mentor. I wish that he passes down his knowledge and skill onto you." Badgerstar finished the ceremony, Honeypaw touching her nose to Squidfur's and giving his shoulder a lick.

Amberpaw shifted next to Whitepaw and Rainpaw, her claws unsheathing and flexing into the frosted grass. Her amber glare on Badgerstar was sharper and colder than any ice. "They're just kits..." She murmured to herself.

"The apprentice's den will be more cramped than ever!" Rainpaw attempted to lighten the mood, exchanging a wary glance with Whitepaw. "Yeah, with *kits* in there!" Amberpaw scoffed.

Whitepaw ran his tail-tip along her back. "I'm afraid we just have to live with it." He murmured. "Hey, at least we'll be able to boss them around!" Rainpaw mewed, only half-joking. Amberpaw had to stop herself from laughing. "And make them check the elders' ticks," She joked, a purr rumbling in her throat.

But her amusement faded quickly as Badgerstar leapt down from the Clanrock. His shadow stretched long across the clearing, darkening the frosted grass. He padded straight past Mudstrike without a glance, tail lashing, and vanished into his den. The murmurs of the gathered warriors followed him like wasps.

Beeflight bent her head over her kits, wrapping her tail protectively around them. Honeypaw pressed close to her mother's flank, her small body trembling despite the ceremony. Flamepaw tried to puff out his chest like Berryfang, but his fur bristled with unease. Only

Mottledpaw's gaze stayed steady, though his eyes flicked anxiously toward Mudstrike.

Mudstrike padded to them, crouching low to meet their eyes. His voice was gentle, but his tail-tip twitched with barely suppressed fury. "You'll do fine," he murmured, brushing each of their ears with his muzzle. Then his gaze slid toward Badgerstar's den, and his claws dug deep into the earth.

Across the clearing, a few cats whispered together. Redfang's whiskers twitched as he muttered something to Dawntuft, and Cloveryawn shook her head with a low growl. Even the elders shifted uneasily, their ears flicking. Apprentices at four moons—such a thing had never been done before.

"It's disgraceful." Toadcroak rasped to Flywhisker. "I may be younger, but even I know it's against the will of StarClan to apprentice kits so young." She whispered back.

A few warriors didn't seem to care, and some even seemed to agree with Badgerstar's decision.

She leaned close to Whitepaw, her voice sharp as claws. "He can't do this forever. What happens when the kits can't keep up? When they get hurt?"

Whitepaw sighed, though his tail-tip brushed comfort against her flank again. "He's the leader. We don't have a choice."

Amberpaw's gaze followed the three new apprentices as they padded toward the apprentice's den, their pawsteps small against the frost-hardened earth. She dug her claws into the frozen grass until her pads ached.

Whitepaw cast his sister a glance. *She'll be on my side when the battle comes.* He told himself. *I know she will.*

28.

Today was the day. Geckopaw's final assessment! Sorrelpaw and Spottedpaw were in the nursery, playing with the kits since their mentors were busy with other duties. She carefully groomed herself before her assessment, with nothing better to do until Rushblink finished her fresh-kill.

Geckopaw! Whitepaw's voice boomed through her head. "Whitepaw!" She hissed under her breath, not wanting any cat to hear her other than Whitepaw. *Meet me at our usual spot.* He told her, even his thoughts sounding worried. "I can't. I'll be sitting vigil tonight." She whispered right before Rushblink entered the den.

"Come on," She beckoned with her head, "it's time for your assessment."

Geckopaw rose quickly, smoothing down a tuft of fur along her flank. *Not now, Whitepaw. StarClan, why does it have to be now?* She dipped her head to Rushblink and followed her out into the clearing, forcing her paws not to stumble. The dawn air was cool, fresh with river-mist, but all she could feel was the echo of Whitepaw's voice pounding in her mind.

Rushblink padded ahead, her ginger tail high. "Today will be a simple test, Geckopaw. Hunt, track, fight—prove to me you can survive as a warrior. I want to see sharp eyes, quick paws, and RiverClan strength."

"Yes, Rushblink," Geckopaw mewed, her voice steady though her chest was tight. She couldn't let her mentor see her distraction. Not when she was so close to her warrior name.

But as they headed toward the riverbank, Whitepaw's voice pressed into her mind again, sharper, urgent. *Geckopaw—please. Don't brush me off. Something's happened.*

Her ears twitched, and she had to stop herself from glancing around

wildly. "What now?" she whispered under her breath, pretending to cough when Rushblink glanced back.

Badgerstar's moving faster than we thought. He's already meeting with ThunderClan. If we don't act soon... we'll lose everything. Whitepaw's voice cracked with a kind of desperation she'd never heard from him before.

Geckopaw's paws felt like stone. ThunderClan now, too? The task had already seemed impossible—now it felt like suffocating under river water. But she straightened as Rushblink slowed at the edge of the reeds. *One thing at a time,* she told herself. She would get through this assessment. Then, she would meet Whitepaw.

"Ready?" Rushblink asked, her blue eyes sharp but not unkind. Geckopaw nodded, forcing confidence into her voice. "I'm ready."

Inside, though, her thoughts churned with Whitepaw's echoing words. *How am I supposed to be a warrior for my Clan... and fight against Badgerstar's warriors at the same time?* She thought, frustration churning in her belly.

The hunting portion of her assessment began. She stalked through the reeds, sniffing the cold air. Through the suffocating scent of snow, she could smell a nearby shrew. She slowly crept towards it, suddenly more afraid than ever that she'd step on a twig, or her tail would rustle a leaf, or she'd hesitate and the prey would get away—

Geckopaw suddenly realized she was much closer than she should have been to the shrew. One of its little ears twitched. Knowing she'd lose the catch if she didn't make a move, she shifted all her weight onto her haunches and leapt forward. The shrew began to run, but Geckopaw fell with her forepaws on both sides of it. She quickly gave it the killing bite.

Rushblink emerged from the bushes. "That was good, Geckopaw, but you cannot hesitate like that! Just a heartbeat later and that shrew would have escaped." She scolded, but a hint of worry was hidden behind her sharp blue eyes.

She's just as worried as I am about my assessment. Geckopaw realized,

shifting her paws. "Oh well. Since Fernshine is supposed to be here soon, we'll wait for her." As if on cue, Fernshine bounded over to them.

"Sorry! I was trying to find you, but it's impossible to try and track scents in this frost!" Fernshine shivered, as if for emphasis that it was cold.

Rushblink sniffed, her nose wrinkling. "You smell of ShadowClan." She pointed out, her sharp eyes narrowing in suspicion. *She was meeting Badgerstar!* A sense of dread crashed over her like a wave. "I was near the ShadowClan border. They'd just renewed their marks." She lied, and great StarClan she was good at it!

"Whatever, we don't have the time for this! It's time for the fighting portion." Rushblink took a step back, while Fernshine got ready. Geckopaw's neck fur pricked. "Don't hurt each other!" Rushblink called as Fernshine lunged herself at Geckopaw.

Geckopaw barely had time to brace before Fernshine slammed into her shoulder, sending her staggering sideways. She dug her claws into the frozen ground and twisted, hissing in surprise. *She's coming at me like I'm a real enemy!*

Fernshine's eyes gleamed, colder than the snow-dusted reeds around them. "Come on, Geckopaw," she growled, circling, "show us what you've got."

Geckopaw lashed her tail and lunged, aiming a swipe at Fernshine's flank the way she'd been taught. But Fernshine darted aside with a speed that startled her, hooking Geckopaw's foreleg and tugging hard. Geckopaw yowled as she toppled onto her side, the shrew still clamped in her jaws falling into the frost.

"Enough, Fernshine!" Rushblink snapped, ears flicking back. "This is an assessment, not a battle."

But Fernshine only pressed harder, pinning Geckopaw with a weight that felt far more threatening than any spar should. Her hot breath brushed Geckopaw's ear as she hissed low enough for only her to hear: "If you stand against him, you'll regret it."

Geckopaw's heart pounded. *She knows. She knows I know about Badgerstar.*

Summoning strength from sheer panic, she twisted sharply and sank her teeth into Fernshine's shoulder—just hard enough to make her leap back with a hiss. Both she-cats crouched, pelts bristling, but Rushblink shoved herself between them.

"That's enough!" her voice cracked. "Geckopaw, well done getting free. Fernshine, you're supposed to be testing her, not tearing her apart!"

Fernshine licked her shoulder, eyes smoldering. "She did well," she muttered, though her gaze lingered on Geckopaw with a warning sharp as claws.

Geckopaw's breathing slowed, but inside she was rattling like dry reeds in the wind. Rushblink thought she'd just proven herself as a warrior—but Fernshine's whisper told her the truth. Her assessment wasn't about skills anymore. It was about survival.

Rushblink glared at Fernshine, her claws flexing into the snow. "I will be telling Beaverstar about this." She hissed, signaling with her tail for Geckopaw to follow her back to camp. With one last anxious glance towards Fernshine, she followed closely behind Rushblink.

As they walked back into the camp, Beaverstar leapt onto the clan rock. "All cats old enough to swim, gather beneath the rock for a Clan meeting!" He rasped.

"Geckopaw has completed her final assessment." He announced, looking at Rushblink, signaling for her to speak. "Geckopaw did well on her hunting, she caught a shrew. It was a somewhat messy catch, but a catch anyways." With a quick glare at Fernshine, she continued, "Fernshine attacked Geckopaw as if she were a ShadowClan warrior."

The crowd immediately erupted into gasps and whispers. "But Geckopaw did well in fighting back without hurting Fernshine." Rushblink spoke over the crowd.

"I believe Geckopaw shows the promising traits of a good warrior. Geckopaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?" Beaverstar's calm blue eyes landed on Geckopaw. "I do." She replied, her own eyes wide with excitement.

"I call upon my ancestors to look down on this apprentice and acknowledge her hard work to learn the ways of your code. Geckopaw, from now on you will be known as Geckonose. StarClan honors your intelligence and forethought." Beaverstar rasped before the clan began cheering.

Geckonose beamed as even Mossgrowl cheered her warrior name. The only cat who didn't cheer was Fernshine, who watched the new warrior with the eyes of a hawk. But Geckonose didn't care.

She was a warrior.

29.

It'd been a quarter-moon since Whiteflame and Geckonose met in their usual spot. They'd both become warriors, which meant more duties. But the two finally arranged something— and Geckonose was very excited to see him again after becoming a warrior. She had no idea he was a warrior too.

After the dusk patrol had returned, Geckonose carefully stepped over tails and made sure not to brush against any flanks. *The warriors den sure is more crowded than the apprentices den!* She thought as she nearly stepped on Mossgrowl's tail.

She slunk away from the camp, staying low to the ground as she stalked through RiverClan territory. She sniffed the air, able to see Whiteflame waiting for her in the reeds just on the border. Geckonose stalked towards him, poking her head through the reeds. "Whitepaw!" She whispered, her green eyes shining with excitement. "Ah, it's actually Whiteflame now." He corrected her.

"Ah, sorry!" Geckonose apologized as Whiteflame emerged from the reeds. "It's fine. I'll race you to the Twolegplace!" Whiteflame grinned, beginning to sprint. Geckonose leapt forwards, sprinting past him. "I bet I'll beat you!" She called over her shoulder.

Whiteflame immediately took the challenge, panting as he picked up his pace. He only passed her for long enough to catch a mouse, and then she fell in beside him again. They reached the Twolegplace at the same time, but Whiteflame rolled underneath it first. "I win!" He purred proudly.

Geckonose scoffed, squeezing herself through the gap between the ground and the bottom of the Twolegplace. "Whatever. I'll beat you next time!" Geckonose murmured under her breath, giving her chest fur an embarrassed lick. Whiteflame went quiet, suddenly much less confident and proud than just a few heartbeats ago.

He cleared his throat, every fur on his pelt feeling hot with

embarrassment. "Um... Geckonose? You're a great friend and all—" Geckonose cut him off.

"Are you saying you don't want to meet up anymore?" She sounded hurt, her green eyes glittering as she looked at Whiteflame. "No!" He sounded equally as horrified at the idea, "No, it's not that at all! In fact, I want to meet up *more* often."

Geckonose tilted her head in confusion. "What are you saying?" She asked, the hurt in her eyes turning into hope. "Geckonose, you're a great friend, but.. I want to be *more* than that. I want to be your mate." Whiteflame's claws flexed nervously in and out of the dirt. While he anxiously waited for an answer, Geckonose's eyes went wide.

"I'd like nothing more!" She answered after what felt like forever to Whiteflame. Whiteflame's chest loosened in relief, and he let out a purr that he couldn't hold back. His tail brushed hers tentatively, and when she didn't pull away, he pressed his flank against hers. "StarClan, I thought you'd say no," he admitted, whiskers twitching sheepishly.

Geckonose purred too, the sound rumbling through her chest. "Why would I ever say no? You're reckless, stubborn, and way too fast for your own good..." she teased, nudging him with her shoulder, "...but you're also brave, and kind, and—" she hesitated, lowering her voice, "—you understand me, more than any cat in my Clan."

The reeds rustled faintly in the cold breeze, and for a moment, the world felt very small—just the two of them, hidden in shadows beneath the Twolegplace.

Whiteflame's blue eyes softened, but a flicker of unease crept in. "It won't be easy," he murmured. "We'll have to be careful. If Badgerstar ever found out, he'd—" He stopped himself, claws digging into the soil at the thought.

Geckonose's ears flattened. "And Fernshine would tear me apart if she even suspected," she added. But she forced a small smile, brushing her tail along his flank. "Then we just... won't let them find out. We'll make this ours."

Whiteflame nodded, his gaze locked on hers. For while, they stayed there, pelts pressed together, listening to the distant night sounds of the forest and Twolegplace. For once, the looming war, the prophecy, the heaps of betrayal—all of it felt far away.

The only thing that felt nearby was Whiteflame. She stared at Whiteflame, quietly and happily. That was until she heard a growl. "Hungry?" Geckonose purred teasingly. Whiteflame chuckled nervously. "Badgerstar didn't let me eat today because I couldn't catch anything." He murmured. Geckonose felt anger flaring up inside her.

"How could he?! That's terrible!" Geckonose's voice cracked a bit. *It's leaf-bare! Not every cat is able to catch enough to fill the fresh-kill pile!* She thought angrily, *I could, but he isn't like me. He doesn't have the same powers.*

"Calm down, love." Whiteflame purred. Geckonose's fur felt warmer than before when he called her 'love'. But she shook the feeling away— she was supposed to be angry with Badgerstar, not swooning over Whiteflame! "We should both go back to camp." She muttered, looking away nervously. Whiteflame nodded. "I'll see you soon." He promised, giving her cheek a swift lick.

As Whiteflame snuck back into camp, he held a squirrel in his jaws. He'd caught one on his way back. Badgerstar suddenly fell in behind him, causing Whiteflame to flinch away. His neck fur stood on edge.

"Out hunting late, I see?" Badgerstar glanced at the squirrel that Whiteflame held. He tried to make his fur lay down, but a cough from the medicine den made him flinch again. He forced himself to nod. "Uh.. yeah..." He murmured. "I suppose that makes up for the catch you missed earlier." Badgerstar's yellow eyes gleamed with pride.

"You know, Whiteflame, I never catch another cat hunting this late — let alone catching something in the dark *and* the cold. I know you are dedicated to ShadowClan more than anycat." Badgerstar's pride turned to something else— malice. "Soon, there will be a battle. And only the strong deserve to survive. My son, I want you to battle beside me. You are strong, and that should be known."

30.

Whiteflame hardly slept in the past few sunrises. He was on Badgerstar's side now. Well, not really. He was pretending to be on his father's side, because soon all the battling cats would meet up. *I need to know their plans.* He told Geckonose. Thankfully, she understood.

Whiteflame dipped his head, though inside, his belly churned like storm-tossed water. Pretending to stand with Badgerstar was one thing. But if he slipped even once, if his father caught a hint of betrayal in his gaze... Whiteflame knew he wouldn't live for even another heartbeat.

Whiteflame padded into the leader's den, his fur prickling as the damp shadows swallowed him. Badgerstar was crouched near the back, his tail curled around his paws. His amber eyes glowed like shards of fire in the dim light. "You're late," Badgerstar growled. Whiteflame dipped his head quickly, forcing the fur along his neck to stay flat. "Forgive me. I was checking the patrols. I didn't want any cat suspecting anything. Rumors spread around here quicker than a fire."

Badgerstar's ears twitched, and for a heartbeat Whiteflame feared he'd said too much. But then his father let out a rough purr. "Good. Caution will keep you alive, son. You'll need it for what's coming."

Whiteflame's claws dug into the earth. *What's coming?* That was what he needed to know. He flicked his tail respectfully. "Tell me, Badgerstar. I want to be ready."

"Soon, the others will gather. ShadowClan cannot afford weakness. When the battle begins, we strike first—hard enough to crush them before they can raise their claws." He grinned, his fangs sharp and yellow. A chill rippled through Whiteflame's pelt. "All of them? Even RiverClan?" he asked carefully, angling his ears to hide his unease.

"Especially RiverClan," Badgerstar snarled. "They've grown too bold with their fat fish-bellies. They'll regret ever thinking they could match ShadowClan. But our RiverClan allies will stay loyal, even when attacking their own clan."

Whiteflame gave a slow nod, though bile rose in his throat. He could almost hear Geckonose's voice. *You must be careful, Whiteflame. One wrong word, and he'll know.*

Badgerstar leaned closer, his breath hot against Whiteflame's ear. "You will play your part well, won't you? I trust you above all others."

Whiteflame forced himself to meet his father's burning gaze. "Of course," he murmured, though his heart thundered like war drums in his chest. *StarClan help me! If he ever finds out the truth, I'm as good as crow-food!*

"Good. Soon RiverClan, ShadowClan, WindClan, and ThunderClan will join together, and the forest will be run by the strong!" Badgerstar's voice echoed through Whiteflame's ears. "And as for weaklings who don't join us, show them no mercy in the battle."

Whiteflame felt the words scrape at him like thorns. Badgerstar's breath was hot on his neck, his amber eyes boring into him as if he were nothing more than a piece of prey to be measured. "Show them no mercy," the leader had snarled. The command hung in the den like fangs biting down on their prey.

He bowed his head, the practiced posture of obedience settling over him. "Of course," he murmured, every syllable a lie sharpened by fear. Inside, his heart pounded so hard he thought Badgerstar might hear it. If his father suspected even a sliver of betrayal, Whiteflame knew there would be no second chances.

When Badgerstar finally turned away, satisfied, Whiteflame stayed a heartbeat longer in the shadowed cool of the den. The leader's tail scraped the earth as he left, the sound like the closing of a trap. Whiteflame pressed his muzzle into his chest fur and breathed slow, trying to bury the image of Branchstar and the WindClan cats standing at the moor. "Especially RiverClan," Badgerstar had said.

The words burned.

He slipped from the leader's den like a shadow, every pawstep measured, every whisker tuned. The camp was hushed; most warriors were sleeping, unaware of the fault lines forming beneath their paws. The moon poured down in a pale ribbon, and for a sick moment he almost wished it would blot out and leave him in blackness where no one could see the fear on his face.

At the reeds, Geckonose waited as she always did, a slender silhouette against the silver river. The sight of her steadied him. He let his fear spill into a single thought and pushed it to her — not with sound but with the quiet thread of his mind. *Badgerstar met with Branchstar. WindClan, ThunderClan, RiverClan—he's gathering them. He plans to strike first. Especially RiverClan.*

Geckonose's green eyes widened; the soft ripple of her tail betrayed the tremor in her pelt. She mouthed his name without making a sound, and when he stepped closer she could see the set of his jaw, the way his paws curled at every word he spoke. "He said—" Whiteflame breathed, lowering his voice until it was a hush against the reeds. He told her what had been said in the den, every brutal phrase. "He thinks mercy is weakness. He wants us to break the Clans so only the strong remain."

Geckonose's claws sank into the muddy bank. For a moment she was ashen, the wind stealing the color from her face. Then her shoulders drew up and something fierce sparked in her eyes. "We can't let him," she hissed. "If he begins with RiverClan—if he convinces others—there'll be no coming back." Her voice was low, but it carried the iron of someone who had seen too much to be cowed.

Whiteflame nodded. "I'll keep pretending. I'll learn everything I can. But you must be careful—if anyone smells deceit on me, Badgerstar will use it to tear you apart." He swallowed. The lie tasted like ash, but the weight of it made his resolve harder. "We find our allies quietly. We prepare. We warn who we can without alerting him. We end him before he can make his 'new forest' real."

They sat in the reeds until the moon sank low, two warriors

between duty and treason, each thinking of the cost. Around them the river kept its old, indifferent course; but beneath its surface new currents were gathering, and Whiteflame felt, for the first time, the true shape of what he must become—spy, liar, son of a leader he would one day have to overthrow.

"Tomorrow," Geckonose whispered finally, "tell me everything you learn. And don't trust anyone in camp—not even your name." She pressed her flank to his, a tiny, fierce comfort. "We'll do this together."

Whiteflame curled beside her, feeling the fragile warmth of that promise. In the thin light before dawn, he let the fury and fear knot inside him into something that looked, at last, like purpose.